A NEW SERIAL STORY STARTS NEXT

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 364. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 21ST, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

PROVERBS TO BE DOTTED DOWN.

Better do a thing than wish it done.
Well, buy a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS**, don't wish it bought.
Eat not to dulness.
But if by chance you should, take **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Excess calls in the doctor.
But **BEECHAM'S PILLS** stop him.
Have always a ready mouth for a ripe cherry.
And **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Second trials often succeed.
BEECHAM'S PILLS succeed first time.
Punctuality begets confidence.
So do **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
It is good to begin well, better to finish well.
BEECHAM'S PILLS do both.
Little strokes fell great oaks.
And **BEECHAM'S PILLS** cure big ills.
Light suppers make long lives.
So do **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Strive to learn from all things.
BEECHAM'S PILLS especially.
Once a use and ever a custom.
After one trial of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Home is home, be it ever so humble.
But the humblest must have a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Great souls have great wills.
Great men insist on **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
In an orderly house all is soon ready.
And a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** handy if needed.
A man without reason is one without season.
When he won't take **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
A disease known is half cured.
BEECHAM'S PILLS do the other half.
Better have some of a pudding than none of a pie.
But **BEECHAM'S PILLS** are often handy after both.
Observation is the best teacher.
Then observe this, "**BEECHAM'S PILLS ARE WORTH A GUINEA A BOX.**"
Xcellence is the reward of merit.
That is the reason **BEECHAM'S PILLS** have attained such wide-spread popularity.

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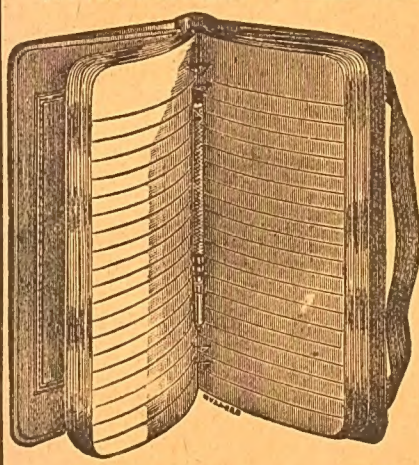

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As will be seen from the Illustration, this Note-Book has a hollow "rest" cut into the back, into which the Pencil falls and is securely held, while by means of an ingenious contrivance called a "Self-Register," the person using the Book can at once open it where he was last writing. A reference to any page in the front, the middle, or the end is also materially assisted by the "Self-Register."

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I resolved to try them. After taking a few small boxes, I lost all the painful symptoms, and now enjoy good health. I feel I owe my life to you. Publish my statement as you please."

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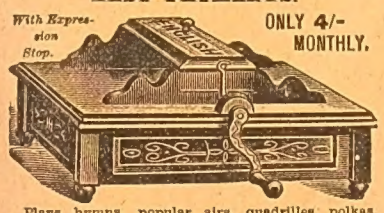

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"Dear Sir,—Sample Handkerchief and present to hand this morning, with which I am both exceedingly pleased and absolutely astounded at the price you are putting them in at. You are worthy of patronage. With all possible despatch please forward me to above address 14 more as follows: 10 Ladies' and 4 Gentlemen's. Enclosed you will find P.O.O.'s as per your quotation, 11s. 6d. Sincerely hoping you may have an extensive sale of the Handkerchiefs.—Yours faithfully, JOHN D. COSTA."

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2/9 and 4/6 per box, plain wrapper, post free to all parts. Dr. O. GREY, 57, Weymouth St., Portland Pl., London, W.

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4 Best "E's" (samples) 9d., post free.

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EDITED BY ARTHUR PEARSON OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY

SHORT STORIES

No. 364.] For the Week ending December 21st, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

AN ENGAGEMENT RING.

ARTHUR DUNSTAN was deeply in love with one of two young women. Whether that one was Miss Eugenia Marlowe or Miss Clara Santley was the question which was making an imbecile of him. It may be hard to love in vain, but even this lacks the harrowing features of feeling that one loves but knows not whom. Dunstan was very fair in his distribution of favours, averaging three calls a week upon each of the young women. He vacillated between the two magnets as regularly as the swing of a clock pendulum.

For three years affairs had run on after this fashion. In the meantime, Society had busied itself, at calls and afternoon teas, in wondering which young woman Mr. Dunstan really preferred, or in substantiating the prophecies of experienced dames who said he had no thought of being anything else than a good-natured bachelor during the remainder of his natural life. These social wiseacres had no inkling of the war which was going on in the much-to-be-desired-heart of this son of a millionaire banker.

Fortune favours the patient as well as the brave, sometimes. Late one afternoon, while Arthur was sitting at his desk, dreamily listening to the click-click of the typewriter, as quickly, as deftly as an inspiration comes to a poet, the realisation came to him that it was Miss Santley whom he loved. Yes, he loved her madly, and life would be unbearable to him until he knew that she returned his affection. Within three minutes he was roundly rating himself for not having known from the first that Clara was in every way the more lovable lady of the puzzling pair.

When that same evening this beautiful young lady said softly: "Yes," and he held her close to his heart, he realised what a blessed thing it is to own completely the affection of a woman you love—and to know that she the right one.

"Are you very sure, Arthur, that you do not care more for Miss Marlowe?" she asked, and then added, before he had time to answer: "She is a very pretty girl, you know."

"Yes. Very sure. This is the happiest moment in all my life. I wish I had something to give you as a token of remembrance." He looked down at his clothes as if in search of something, but nothing offered itself.

"Here, take this!" She drew from her finger a ring and held it out towards him. It was a sapphire of old-fashioned design. "It's an heirloom of the family. You may keep it until you bring me another."

She seized his hand and tried nervously to put it on his little finger. It was too small, however, and would barely pass the first joint.

She stepped back a little way and surveyed him with admiration.

"My, what a big fellow you are! You shall not spoil my plan, though."

After fingering in his vest pocket an unreasonably long time she succeeded in bringing out his watch, and, after she had unhooked the chain, she slipped the ring upon it.

"There, now, I hope I shall always have you so secure." She stood apart from him again and looked at him with a smile.

"You shall," he answered chivalrously, happily.

"Don't forget that the affair at Tappersley's is to-morrow night. Come early," she said, as they parted at the door.

As she hurried up to her room with light step she was so happy that she wished she might herald the fact of her engagement to all of the gay people who would assemble at Mrs. Tappersley's the next evening.

Mr. Dunstan was sitting in his office at precisely the same hour that he had discovered the identity of his sweetheart on the afternoon previous, when he unconsciously ran his finger along his watch chain and found that something which ought to be there was missing. He looked—the ring was gone. He suddenly became greatly excited. He fumbled among his papers with nervous

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fingers, pulled out every drawer in his desk and scraped underneath it with his ruler.

"Beggs, have you seen a ring—a sapphire ring of old-fashioned design—about here?" Beggs said that he had not, and he was very sorry. Then every clerk in the office was questioned until his father came very near precipitating a fatal attack of heart disease, because the business of the office was interrupted by what he considered a very trivial occurrence.

"I must have left it in my room," Dunstan thought as he made for a cab. "Probably I took it off when I changed from one vest to another."

Great drops of perspiration stood on Arthur's forehead as he sat down for a moment's rest, puffing madly at a cigar. Collars, cuffs, and articles of men's wearing apparel were distributed over the floor. The ring! Where was it? He looked at the broken *bric-à-brac* and puffed harder at his cigar. One servant had been insulted with accusations and another compelled to three times sift over all the ashes in the bin, without avail.

Dunstan knew how highly Miss Santley valued the ring. It was a relic of the Santley family's history, a history of which she was very proud. A family history was something that Miss Marlowe did not possess, although her father had spent much of the money he had made in mining to cover up the absence. Naturally Miss Marlowe was envious of her rival's heirloom, an equal of which she did not possess.

"Lost or stolen," Dunstan concluded, was the last resort. He drove to the nearest police station at once and left a complete description of the ring. Then he fashioned an advertisement for the morning papers which read after this fashion:

"Lost—A gold ring, sapphire setting, antique design. Finder will be rewarded with £100 and no questions asked."

This notice he placed in all the papers save one, which he knew that her father read as regularly every morning as he ate his breakfast. His sweetheart probably did not read the morning papers, but if she should happen to see his little advertisement he felt that she could not fail to recognise the property in question, and then he would be irretrievably lost. What would she or any other girl think of a lover who was so careless as to lose a token of her love and confidence within twenty-four hours after they had become engaged?

About the same time in the late afternoon that Mr. Arthur Dunstan was passing in his notice at one of the little offices which receives "ads" for all the papers Mr. Walter Gibson was sauntering along Regent Street. The important business of selecting an engagement ring had been occupying his attention since luncheon. He was returning to his apartments without one, simply because in all the costly array of rings in the shop windows he had been unable to find one which he thought would suit the taste and fancy of his *fiancée*. He and Dunstan were acquaintances and had sometimes been called rivals.

The sparkle of a diamond in the rays of the sunlight, displayed on a case in a window, attracted his attention just because he happened to be thinking of diamonds. He instinctively turned aside to look at it. Next to the diamond, which was not remarkable as diamonds go, was a sapphire ring of antique design attached to a card bearing the explanation:

This ring is over 300 years old.
It was at one time worn by Marie Antoinette of France.
Price £60.

Mr. Solomon Goldstein, pawnbroker, had an eye to business.

"That's just the kind of ring to please Gene," thought Gibson. "It's a very common sort of place to buy anything, but I'll step in and see the Jew."

Ten minutes later Gibson emerged from the shop owner of the ring. He had bought it for £50, which was £35 more than Mr. Goldstein had paid for it. Gibson was well satisfied with his purchase. He knew the value of antique rings.

In the meantime, Dunstan was unsuccessfully endeavouring to swallow a few mouthfuls of food at the Holborn. The Tappersleys' ball was to be a grand affair. Arthur had invited Miss Santley, and there was no opportunity of escaping attendance or of eluding a meeting with her that evening. He had thought of illness as an excuse, and of making a clean breast of the matter by telling the truth; but the first was cowardly, and the latter made him appear stupid, and reflected upon the genuineness of his devotion.

He blurted out when he came into the room where she was sitting: "I've just discovered that I was guilty of a very absent-minded trick. You see that I left your ring on the table when I was changing my clothes."

"I will forgive you this time if you will promise not to do it again. I know you are absent-minded."

She was a picture of radiance, beauty, and graciousness as she stood before him in evening dress. He felt it was indeed a boon to have a wife who could forgive his little failings. "Only do be careful not to lose it, dear. I value it more than anything else I possess." Arthur winced when she added this.

Miss Marlowe was at the Tappersleys' ball. The knots of gossipers remarked that young Gibson had become very attentive to her of late, and also that Mr. Dunstan was with Miss Santley. During a lull in the dancing the two young women were thrown together. There was an exchange of greetings and two formal bows.

"Oh! Miss Santley, I have been searching for you all the evening," chirruped Miss Marlowe. "I want to compare this ring with your own. I think they are just alike." She held up a sapphire setting of old-fashioned design for her rival's inspection.

Miss Santley flushed to the roots of her hair. Then she turned pale.

"I haven't mine to-night," she said hastily, looking for a way of escape.

"I thought you always wore it?"

"I do. But—but—I am having it cleaned."

Miss Santley hurried on into the gossiping throng, nothing being perceptible to her save the hum-hum of the many mingled voices ringing in her ears. Miss Marlowe followed her with her eyes, and a little smile of pride showed itself upon her pretty lips.

"Mr. Dunstan," Miss Santley said coldly, when she met him a moment later, "I am not feeling well. I wish to go home."

Dunstan was greatly alarmed. He saw that the colour had quite left her face, and she appeared to be very ill. The carriage was ordered at once, and while they were waiting he sat and looked at her helplessly.

On the way home she lay back among the cushions in silence and gazed out at the falling snow. Arthur grew more embarrassed. He did not know exactly what was the proper thing to do. His heart was aching for her, she appeared to be so ill and seemed to be so bravely endeavouring to suppress it.

"Clara, what can I do? I want to do something to help you."

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She rose up a little, stared at him wildly, and said, so icily that it fairly made the poor fellow shiver:

"Thank you!"

That put an end to the conversation during the remainder of the drive. When they reached the house, he attempted to help her up the steps in a lover-like way, but she refused his arm with: "I can help myself very nicely, thank you, Mr. Dunstan." As they parted at the door she said:

"Mr. Dunstan, I think we understand each other after what has happened to-night."

She closed the door before Arthur could realise what it all meant. When he did he was the most crestfallen man in London. The few hours of sleep he got that night were filled with travels through a wild, unexplored country in search of a recreant ring. On awakening from a short and restless nap the next morning, he sprang from his bed like a rocket.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed. "Now, I remember! I must have dropped it into the bundle that went to the washerwoman."

When Dunstan was dressed, which probably took the space of about two minutes, he was clad in his full dress trousers, a light waistcoat, and his smoking jacket. He threw his overcoat on over these, and made a double quick charge for Mrs. Jackson's laundry. He found the little woman picking over her morning's custom and watching her assistants.

"Mrs. Jackson, did you find a ring in my package yesterday?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. Own up, now, or I'll call a policeman," cried Dunstan.

Mrs. Jackson had a wholesome fear of policemen. She stole the ring, of course. Goldstein, the pawnbroker, bought it of her for £15.

"I'll get it for you, sir. You shall have it back!"

"Come and show me where you sold it, or there will be one less washerwoman on the face of the earth."

Mrs. Jackson put on her things and trudged along with Dunstan to Goldstein's. That worthy Jew admitted having bought and sold the ring, but of course he did not know the purchaser. Of course, he did not know that the ring had been stolen, and he was in no way responsible.

"Oh, I don't know about that, Mr. Pawnbroker," said Dunstan, biting his lip angrily. "I am a lawyer myself. It depends upon whether I get the ring back or not what I shall do."

Just at this point Mr. Goldstein's memory was suddenly refreshed. He didn't know; possibly he remembered the young man who purchased it after all. Yes, upon reflection, it was a Mr. Gibson. When he thought further he knew Mr. Gibson's address.

Gibson was sitting before his grate, devoting himself listlessly, by turns, to three occupations—munching toast, drinking coffee, and smoking a cigarette. On this particular morning he was quite contented with himself and every one else. When Dunstan came running in upon the quiet of his apartments his sudden appearance upset Gibson's coffee upon his dressing-gown, and completely unbalanced his mental equilibrium.

"Gibson, you bought a ring yesterday at a pawnbroker's—a sapphire ring of antique design. The ring was stolen from me. I want it back." Dunstan rattled this off as if he were making a summary of a case at law.

"Really, my dear fellah, aren't you a twiffle hasty? Sit down and calm yourself."

"Well. I haven't anything more to say. I must have that ring to-day regardless of cost," said Dunstan, who remained standing.

"You see—aw—the fact of it is, Dunstan, I gave the wing—aw—to—aw—Miss Marlowe. Awfully embawrassing thing, you know, to awsk her for it. You couldn't—aw—wait a few days? I might—aw—pwecipitate a quahl. It's not a despewate case between us, you know. Then she would give it bahck. We might awwange a plot, like the story writers do, you know. You could flirt with her, and I would be angwy. Jove, you know, I think that's an idewa."

"I won't talk of it. I shall have to ask you to have the ring at my rooms by three o'clock this afternoon, or I shall be compelled to go to Miss Marlowe and tell her where you purchased it."

"Weally," Gibson attempted to say in a sarcastic tone.

"I suggest that you tell her it was bought of a bogus count, who stole it."

"Ya-as. That's a good ideah. Thanks awfully. I know so many of these fellahs, you know," said the befuddled young worshipper of rank and title, again trying his tongue at sarcasm.

"I never thought—aw—that Dunstan was such a prig. The ideah of him making such demands."

What method young Gibson used to secure the ring is a matter of conjecture, but of this I am sure, he did not care to have Miss Marlowe know that her engagement emblem was purchased at a pawn-broker's, for, promptly at three o'clock, a messenger arrived at Duncan's rooms, bearing a neat envelope which contained the much sought-for sapphire ring of old-fashioned design.

Two hours later a carriage stopped in front of Mrs. Jackson's door. Mr. Arthur Dunstan alighted and handed out a young woman. There was an anxious look upon her face.

"Mrs. Jackson," demanded Dunstan sternly, holding the sapphire ring between his fingers.

"Yes, sir, I found it amongst your things and sold it!"

"Yes, that's all right. I believe you," Miss Santley said. "I was very foolish to doubt, but you used to think a great deal of Miss Marlowe, and she is a very pretty girl, you know."

Arthur slipped the sapphire ring upon her finger, and with it another—a diamond of modern design. Then he sealed the gift with something else.

It is needless to say that at the next ball, where both Miss Santley and Miss Marlowe were present, the former approached the latter and said in her politest tones:

"I have my ring now, my dear, if you wish to compare your own with it."

FREDERICK PALMER.

The next issue of **SHORT STORIES,** *a special double number containing 64 pages, will contain, in addition to the opening instalment of a new serial by E. C. Waggener, entitled,* **THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE,** *complete stories by Miss Winifred Graham, Mrs. George Corbett, J. K. Leys, and many other well-known authors. The number will be profusely illustrated, and will form one of the most delightful volumes of seasonable stories ever published. The price of this double number will be twopence.*

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GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DAWN OF AN EMPIRE.

I FOUND them in the midst of an English lesson, which Golden Star was taking, sitting, still clad in her Inca costume, between the Professor and Joyful Star, who also was still dressed as an Inca princess. They all three rose to meet me as I entered the throne room, and Ruth, coming forward to meet me with both hands outstretched, as she had never done before, said:

"What have you been doing all this time, Vilcaroya, and why are you looking so worn and haggard. Have—have you been fighting? And why have you come back here alone?"

Ruth coming forward to meet me.

"Yes," I answered, taking her hands into mine, and feeling all my blood turned to fire as their gentle pressure thrilled along my nerves. "Yes, we have been fighting, and the Lord of Light has fought upon our side, for we have gained the victory, and the city is ours."

"Thank God for that!" she said; "and that no harm has come to you—or to Captain Hartness."

"What! do you mean to say you have taken Cuzco already," cried the Professor; "how on earth did you manage this so quickly?"

"Because," I replied, "as I told you, my father the Sun fought on my side and turned the hearts of his children towards me, and so Francis Hartness led them to speedy victory, and the hearts of our enemies fainted within them, and they have yielded. Now I have come to tell you how it happened, and to take you back to the city where you shall be hailed as queen."

Then I sat down with them and told them all, from the taking of the Governor and his officers prisoners by the Sayacusca, to the capture of the Cuartel and the making of Francis Hartness governor of Cuzco. Then I went and put on the Imperial robes, which I had now a double right to wear, and led them through the gates of bronze into the Hall of Gold. Now, in the joy of my triumph, and the greeting that Ruth had given me, I had forgotten to bid her keep silence while going through the Hall, and when she saw the two cells in the corner built up with blocks of gold she stopped and said:

"Those were not here the other night. What have you had them built up like that for?"

And before I could answer, Djama's voice, shrill and trembling, rose out of the cell crying:

"Ruth, Ruth, I am here! This is my prison. It is a grave of gold. Curse the gold! Save me, save me, Ruth, for I am going mad—and I am your brother!"

She stopped and took hold of my arm with both her hands and looked up at me. Her face was very pale and her lips were trembling. Yet though her voice was low, it was firm as she said to me:

"I have no brother who is a liar and a traitor to his friends; but, Vilcaroya, I had a brother once who was very good and kind to me, and for the sake of his goodness and kindness I ask you to treat this—this prisoner of yours more gently."

"Joyful Star can ask nothing to-day that I could refuse," I said. "He shall be taken out forthwith and lodged with all comfort, though I must keep him safely."

"No, no, not till I am gone!" she whispered, taking Golden Star by the arm and leading her towards the passage. But, softly as she had spoken, Djama heard it, and in his rage and despair at her words he cried:

"You—you won't see me! but you will go with your lover, your Indian master who owes his life to me! You will sell yourself for his gold and be his wife. Oh, my God—my sister!"

And then he raved in the madness that came upon him, and his voice rang horridly out of his cell and echoed shrilly through the Hall and the passages. I could feel no anger against a man who was helpless and my prisoner, so I followed Ruth without speaking; and when we stood once more in the sunlight she turned to me with a bright flush on her cheeks and great tears in her eyes, and said very softly and sweetly:

"No, no, not till I am gone," she whispered.

"He is mad, poor fellow; he must be. That terrible gold has turned his brain, or he could never speak to me like that. You will not treat him more harshly for it, Vilcaroya, will you, for you know, after all, he is—I mean he was my brother, and I loved him very much—once."

"Yes, he is mad," I said; "and yet the lips of madness may speak truth, for what am I but what he said?"

"Have you forgotten what you asked me or what I answered when I kissed Golden Star in the throne-room,

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that you can speak like that?" she said, with one swift glance that told me I had not asked in vain.

What more she might have said I know not, but she had said enough to set my heart dancing and my blood thrilling with a joy greater than I had found in the speedy conquest of the city of my fathers, and just then Tupac came to me and said that a sufficient quantity of gold had been taken out, and that all was ready to return to the city. Then I gave him my orders respecting Djama and his fellow prisoner,

Riding on my black horse.

and ordered Golden Star's litter and the horse for Ruth which we had brought with us to be made ready, and also a mule for the Professor, and when Tupac had returned we set out along the road that leads to the Gate of Sand, I riding in the midst of the troop, with Ruth on my left hand and Golden Star in her litter on the right. As we approached the streets crowds of my delivered people thronged out to welcome us, and when they saw me riding on my black horse, dressed up in the Imperial robes, and with the Llautu on my brow, they set up a shout of joy and welcome, that went ringing along the streets and through the squares and all over the city, and so I rode on through the bareheaded throngs who bowed themselves almost to the earth before me. And as we were crossing the great Plaza, Ruth looked about her with bright cheeks and shining eyes and said to me:

"Is it not all like a dream, Vilcaroya? Only a few weeks ago you came here poor and unknown, and now you are a king come back to your own again. Is it not wonderful?"

"Yes," I said, looking into her eyes with more courage than before; "but something more wonderful even than that has befallen me. Is it not so, my queen?"

"Your queen is not crowned yet, your Majesty," she said, looking down and yet not frowning, as I half feared she would.

"No," I answered, "nor shall she be till my work is done, and the whole land that was my fathers' is mine to give her, and then all that power and gold and love can give her shall be hers."

"Give me the last and I shall ask no more," she said softly, chasing, with that first sweet confession, from my heart the last lingering doubt of the great blessing that had befallen me. Thus we came to the front of the Cuartel, where all the troops were already drawn up in order to receive us, and Hartness came out to greet us. He stopped for an instant, and his cheeks paled a little as he saw Ruth riding at my side, already dressed as she would be when she was my queen. But then the goodness of his honest heart spoke from his lips, and he said, as he held out his hand to me:

"Welcome, your Majesty!—Majesties, I might almost say, I suppose! The city is ours and everything is quiet. Some of the officials have come in and submitted; others I have had to put under arrest, and runners are coming in every minute from the other towns in the valley to say that our plans have been carried out perfectly. The rest of our work won't be as easy as this has been, but we've made a very good beginning, and, at any rate, I think I can congratulate your Majesty on having made your two most important captures."

He looked at Ruth as he said this, and though her fair face flushed brightly and her eyes fell, yet she spoke steadily enough when she answered him, saying:

"You can hardly call me one of the spoils of war, I think, Captain Hartness, though I confess that I have surrendered at discretion. Now give me your hand and help me down, and don't look so disconsolate, for you are not nearly as unfortunate as you think. There is an Inca princess for you also; a real one, too. I have been teaching Golden Star to say your name, and, do you know, she makes it sound just like music with that sweet voice of hers. See, here she is, and you shall hear her say it."

I had dismounted meanwhile, and taken Golden Star from her litter, and when the people saw her, her name ran swiftly from lip to lip, and a great shout of delight rose up from thousands of throats to welcome her back to life and the home of her long-dead fathers. Then I took her hand and Hartness', and put hers in his, and said to him:

"My friend, what I have taken I can in some measure give back to you. Here is Joyful Star's sister-soul and living likeness. I have seen her newly-awakened soul look out of her eyes with love upon you, as in good truth it well might, for you are a true son of the Sun, though not of our blood. In the days to come you may learn to love her too, and then all will be well."

"Yes," said Ruth, coming to his side, "and better than it could have been in any other way. The very Fates themselves seem to have arranged all this, so it is not for mortals to rebel, Captain Hartness."

He looked at her almost sadly for a moment, and then he laughed a little and said:

"I should be more or less than mortal if I did, Miss Ruth. But mind, if I am faithless, remember it is you who have done the most to make me so."

As he said this he raised Golden Star's hand to his lips and kissed it. As she felt the touch of his lips a new light sprang into her blue eyes and shone and danced there, and she said to me:

He raised Golden Star's hand to his lips.

"Why does the Son of the Great People do that, and what have you said to him about me, my brother?"

"He has kissed your hand in loving greeting," I answered, "and what I have said he will no doubt tell you better some day when you can speak together."

The bright blood in her cheeks told me that she had understood me, and she turned her head away, but she did not take her hand from Hartness', and so I gave my hand to Ruth and led her into the Cuartel, and Hartness and

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Golden Star followed us hand in hand amidst the cheers of the soldiers and the joyful shouts of the people.

That night there were such rejoicings in Cuzco as the City of the Sun had not seen since the Spaniards came into the land. I distributed the gold among the soldiers as I had promised, giving to each man a piece of about two ounces in weight, and they, who had never possessed, even if they had ever seen, gold before, kissed it and fondled it in their delight, and swore that they would fight for me as long as one of them was left alive, and then I spoke to them and told them that they had but to be faithful and brave, and their English leader would lead them to victory after victory until the whole land should be ours.

Later on I sent Tupac with many men up to the Hall of Gold, and they brought down the golden throne and the symbols of the Sun and great quantities of gold and jewels, and they set the throne in the midst of the terrace in front of the cathedral, with silver seats on either side of it, on the spot where in the olden times stood the Palace of Viracocha, and on the front of the cathedral, over the great doors, they fixed the symbols of the Sun, and high above all, between the two bell-towers, they placed a great flagstaff.

Before daybreak the next morning the square was thronged with people, save for an open space which the soldiers kept before my throne. I took my place amidst an utter silence. Ruth and Golden Star sat on my right and on my left, and Francis Hartness, with a drawn sword in his hand, stood by my throne to the right and on the terrace behind me, and on either side stood the Men of the Blood, dressed in their ancient and long-forbidden costumes, with which I had furnished them out of the stores in the secret chambers of the fortress.

Then I lifted up my voice and spoke the ancient Invocation.

No word was spoken and no sound was heard over the whole city, and all eyes were turned to the swiftly brightening eastern sky. The blue changed to silver and the silver to crimson and gold. Then the sun, the glorious image of the Lord of Life, arose in all his sudden splendour, and as his rays fell on the great golden, jewel-rayed circle on the cathedral front, the Rainbow Banner ran swiftly up to the head of the flagstaff, and I, rising from my throne, bared my head and, turning my face to the rising sun, bowed myself before it, and at the same instant every head in the vast assembly was uncovered, and all save the soldiers fell on their knees and stretched out their hands to heaven in silent joy and thankfulness.

Then I lifted up my voice and spoke the ancient Invocation to the Sun which generation after generation of my fathers had spoken from the same spot at the beginning of the feast of Raymi, and when I had ended this the Children of the Blood lifted up their voices after me and sang the long-silenced and yet never-forgotten Hymn to the Sun, and then, standing before the kneeling multitude, I replaced the Llautu on my brow and proclaimed myself Inca and supreme Lord of the Land of the Four Regions in the name of my long dead fathers, whose divine right to lordship had been preserved in me.

And so I, Vilcaroya, son of Huayni-Capac, first fulfilled the prophecy that Anda-Huillac had spoken in the Sanctuary of the Sun, and so did I come, as had been said, from one life into another through the shadow of death and the darkness of the grave, with her whose love, now changed, though no less dear, had nerved me to face the ordeal of the strangest fate that had ever befallen one born in mortal shape.

* * * * *

EPILOGUE.

[*An extract from a letter written by Francis Hartness, some time Captain of Her Majesty's Border Rangers and presently General Commanding in Chief and Minister of War of the Empire of Peru, to his father, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Francis Hartness, V.C.*]

". . . . Well, now it is all over, and I think the best thing I can do is to give you just a brief clear outline of what happened after we took Cuzco, and this will enable you to connect up the rather scanty scraps of information that I have been able to send you in the intervals of the fighting. But first I had perhaps better answer your question as to what became of that most extraordinary of mortals, Laurens Djama.

"As I think I have told you before, the man was a perfect intellectual enigma. Personally I never considered him to be quite sane. That his genius for research and his knowledge of physiology were absolutely incomparable could never be questioned by anyone who, like myself, had seen absolute proof of the two apparently incredible miracles that he worked. But, apart from his science, he was a man of decidedly common clay, of strong passions, insatiable avarice, and practically no moral principle. From what Professor Lamson has told me since, he wrought his miracles with no higher motives than in the first place of using the Inca as a means of discovering the lost treasures, and in the second place for gratifying the passion that he had conceived for the Princess during the process of her restoration. This passion, together with the near approaching prospect of what he believed to be illimitable wealth, appears to have quite distorted, even if it did not entirely dethrone, his reason.

"His Majesty the Emperor has, I may say in confidence, admitted that he made a great mistake, possibly due to his ignorance of European character, in allowing Djama to see the contents of the Hall of Gold. Certainly he never was the same afterwards. Everyone knows how miners have gone stark staring mad after sudden discoveries of gold which at most could realise a few thousand pounds. It is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at that on a man of Djama's temperament, the sight of millions' worth of gold and jewels should have produced a somewhat similar effect. Nothing else could account for his going to the Governor, a man he had only spoken to once or twice, and intrusting such a colossal secret to him when he himself was absolutely certain of a very large share of the treasure.

"Of His Majesty's action in walling him up in a cell of gold as a punishment for his treachery it is difficult to speak justly without a complete knowledge of what he himself thought of it. He acted under the impulse of the ideas and traditions which he had brought with him from his own age and his own race, and when we remember that the ancient Incas were accustomed to punish treachery in all its forms with instant death, it must be admitted that His Majesty acted in accordance with his own conceptions of justice, and with a certain grim logic which certainly fitted the punishment to the crime. But that he intended anything but the most generous treatment is quite disproved by what followed.

"Djama was released from his cell the night after we had taken possession of Cuzco, and the next day he was brought unbound before His Majesty after the ceremony in the great plaza. There, in the presence of his sister, the Princess, and myself, His Majesty reproached him gently

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and with the most perfect dignity for the crime that he had committed, and then told him that, for his sister's sake, he would give him back the life and liberty that he had forfeited. He would be conducted beyond the confines of the valley, and there set free with an ample supply of money to take him out of the country to any part of the world he chose to go, and when the war was over gold to the value of two hundred thousand pounds would be consigned to him at the Bank of England or anywhere else where he might choose to have it.

"I think you will agree with me that such generosity as this should have softened the heart of anyone but a hopeless scoundrel or a maniac, which, perhaps, comes to the same thing. But there was a condition attached to it which was perfectly just, and yet in Djama's eyes it seemed to annul all the rest. It was that he should leave South America immediately and never return to any part of the continent. If he was found in Peru within ten days after leaving Cuzco or at any time after he would be shot.

"As soon as Djama heard this his face grew livid and his eyes moved from the Princess to his sister, to and fro three or four times. Then, with a movement so quick that no one could stop him, he snatched a rifle out of the hand of the guard who was standing beside him, levelled it at His Majesty and pulled the trigger. The bullet missed his head by a hairsbreadth, cut off a piece of the crimson fringe of the Borla, killed two men who were standing behind the throne, and badly wounded a third.

"Of course, Djama was instantly disarmed and thrown to the ground. Without moving a muscle and without a shake in his voice His Majesty ordered him to stand up, and bade him choose the manner of his death. Then there happened the strangest thing that I have ever seen except, perhaps, the restoration of the Princess. Djama drew himself up and looked His Majesty straight in the eyes and said as quietly as if he had been delivering a professional opinion:

"'You have threatened me with death before, and I told you then you could not kill me. Now see if I spoke the truth."

"He seemed to draw a quick, deep breath. Then the blood that had rushed to his face in the struggle died out instantly. His jaw dropped, his eyes became fixed and blindly staring, and his body seemed to shrink together and sank down between the two who were holding him. They pulled him upright again, and his head dropped forward. He was stone dead, as dead as if he had been struck by lightning. Of course there was a terrible scene, but I must pass over that. In fact, I don't care to dwell on it any longer than is necessary.

"We found the whole country in a blaze. Everywhere the Indians had risen and were massacring the Peruvians without mercy. Barrera, the revolutionary chief, had taken advantage of the disorder to start on the war-path on his own account. Nicola, the President, took the usual measures, and the first battle should have been fought near Puno, on the shores of Lake Titicaca, but to the amazement of both sides the majority of the troops simply refused to fight until all their arrears of pay were paid. This was an impossibility, for Nicola and Barrera between them hadn't a tithe of the money necessary to do it. So after that came mutiny and a general *battue* of officers.

"We took Sicuani, the railway terminus, without firing a shot, and when we reached Puno the soldiers of both sides who had mutinied just walked out and welcomed us, shouting *'Vivas'* for Vilcaroya and death to the Spaniards. From Puno His Majesty went to the Island of Titicaca and came back with nearly a steamer load of gold. He practically bought Puno up, fixed his headquarters there for the time being, and treated his soldiers royally. The news of this soon got to Arequipa, as he intended it should, and very soon messages came back saying that the city was his whenever he liked to come and take it. So we loaded up three trains and went down to Arequipa with a couple of carloads of gold. The garrison was waiting for us at the railway station without an officer among them. They had shot every one of them.

"We walked into Arequipa at the head of about four thousand men armed to the teeth. The city, of course, submitted without a murmur. All the Peruvian officials that had not been killed were at once displaced, and the city was put under the control of a committee of the foreign residents and merchants. Then I took five hundred men down to Mollendo, and turned every Peruvian out of it at the point of the bayonet, sent the European inhabitants back to Arequipa, blew up the Mole, and burnt the place to the ground. Then we turned back and moved our whole force up to Puno, and there we found that, not only had the Indians of Bolivia risen *en masse*, but that half the army had marched across the frontier and were coming to get their share of the Inca's gold.

"Of course we received them, for they are capital fighters, and now with a thoroughly well-armed and equipped army we began our now famous march across the interior by Cuzco and Ayacucho and Tarma to Oroya, the terminus of the Lima railway. As you know, we had a bit of a fight at Ayacucho and Tarma, but nothing to speak of.

"We had a few smart skirmishes as we got near to Lima, but as soon as the Government officers found how strong we were they retired on the capital with such troops as they could keep faithful to them with all sorts of impossible promises, and at last we sat down before Lima, and gave the President twelve hours to surrender at discretion, and, as you know, he refused, and we went in.

"We had four days' desperate fighting in the streets, and lost over a thousand men. Then the Government troops threw down their arms and surrendered. Nicola was caught trying to escape to a ship in Callao Bay. Barrera, as I think I told you in a former letter, we had already taken prisoner in Arequipa. As soon as the city was quiet Vilcaroya had him brought to Lima, tried the pair of them for oppression, extortion, misuse of public money, and conspiracy against the public welfare, and then hanged them from the towers of the Cathedral. Then he installed himself in the Palace, and, as you know, issued his famous proclamation restoring the empire of the Incas throughout the whole of their ancient dominions, and after that came the treaty with Chile, for which I think I may take the credit to myself. The country is settling down with wonderful rapidity, and His Majesty is displaying all the marvellous genius for government that made his ancestors perhaps the most successful rulers the world has ever seen.

"The Peruvians are having rather a bad time of it, but no worse than their horrible misgovernment has deserved, but all foreigners are finding themselves a great deal better off than they were before. The great Golden Chain has been taken out of the lake in which it was hidden—the one by which Vilcaroya and Golden Star slept their long sleep—and was held by two thousand men round three sides of the Plaza in Lima on the day of His Majesty's formal coronation. A perfect flood of gold has flowed out of the old treasure-houses of the Incas, one of which, by the way, was in no less strange a place than the crater of the Misti. The coinage has been put on a gold basis, and we are buying ironclads and cruisers, and going in generally for European civilisation.

"A conquest of the whole of South America, with the help of Chile, who will very probably join us with a view to amicable partition afterwards, is now a possibility of the not very distant future. And now I don't think I have any more to say, excepting that the young lady who came out to South America as Miss Ruth Djama will very shortly be crowned Empress-Consort of Peru, and that I hope that you, my dear dad, will before very long be father-in-law to a Princess of the Blood."

THE END.

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An Adventure with a Persian Beauty.

Translated from the French of A. Delpit.

WHEN the department of Fine Arts sent me to Persia to write up the Province of Irak-Adjemi, I began by taking up my quarters in Ispahan. At the end of three months I had finished my task, but if I had returned home at once the department would never have believed that I was a man of any depth. I was just about bored to death, when luckily there was a change of governors. The Shah sent, in place of the former governor, his cousin Malcolm-Khan. He had travelled in France, accompanied by Mehmed-Aga, his officer of ordnance. Mehmed-Aga had the rank of general, or rather that of *sertip*, to use the Persian term.

I remember him well—a young man of about thirty, a gentlemanly fellow, something of a swell, who dined with me several times in Paris. You can appreciate my joy in meeting him again. In a week the Aga and I were inseparable.

One morning I was dreamily riding through the city, giving myself up for the hundredth time to the feeling that I was in fairy-land. Imagine immense avenues, bordered on the right and on the left with arcades, and shaded by gigantic plane-trees at whose feet are streams of running water. I was nearing the Kiosk of Tchechel-Sutoun, when I saw at the street-corner a woman in a litter.

As a general thing, Persian women in the street are like nothing so much as bundles. They are veiled, of course, or, rather, they wear upon their heads a kind of striped curtain which covers the face. Oddly enough, the woman whom I met did not entirely conceal her figure, which was slender and graceful, and I could see her large eyes gleaming like coals of fire.

My horse was walking, and I made him follow very slowly the bearers of the litter. It seemed to me that the unknown looked back once or twice; but, after all, as adventures of this kind in the East are somewhat unsatisfactory, I paid only slight attention to the matter.

I had almost forgotten the occurrence, when, two days after, I again met the litter. This time I was not alone. Mehmed-Aga was walking with me. At the first glance I recognised the veiled lady, and especially remembered those extraordinary eyes. As before, she looked back, but this time the action was more pronounced. I glanced at the Aga, but he pretended to have noticed nothing. We walked along in this way for about ten minutes, when the litter suddenly turned towards the Djoulffa Bridge. The bridge is somewhat of a popular resort for evening promenades, and so I hesitated about following my unknown openly. But there was no hesitation on her part. Suddenly she leant half-way out of the litter, and dropped her handkerchief upon the pavement. I picked it up.

During the rest of the walk the Aga was silent, biting his moustache with a preoccupied air. When we reached the palace he said: "Come in," and when we were alone in his study he began:

"My dear friend, I made no comments a little while ago. But instead of keeping that handkerchief pressed tenderly against your heart you must throw it into the fire."

"You wish me to do so?"

"I do not wish that you should have your throat cut and be thrown into the river. I am in charge of the police of the city, and I am responsible for you to the French Legation. You are astonishing people, you Parisians! You think yourselves always upon the boulevards. We are in the Orient, my friend; and in the Orient husbands are not to be trifled with. At Paris it may be different. Your unknown is not unknown to me. Her name is Nissa."

"Nissa?"

"If the name is charming the husband is not at all so. He is one Astoulla, a very wealthy merchant, famous for his violence and his jealousy. He occupies that house on the river bank just at the end of the bridge. His mother was of English descent, but his own manners are wholly Oriental. He would kill you like a dog."

"And Nissa?"

"Formerly," said the Aga, "unfaithful wives used to be sewn up in sacks and thrown into the river. But we are civilised now. Once a live cat would have been put in the sack. When maddened by the water, the cat would tear the woman's face. This is no longer done; at least, the cat is left out. The influence of Europe," he added drily.

This little conversation somewhat dampened my ardour. Moreover, Mehmed-Aga had the good taste to drop the matter there. I dined with him, and in the evening he called in musicians who played for us Eastern melodies. But I was preoccupied. Constantly before my eyes that graceful figure was bending out of the litter, and a little hand was dropping a handkerchief. A persistent voice was singing in my ear, like the refrain of a ballad: "Nissa! Nissa!" Naturally, I suffered all that night from nightmare. I dreamt that someone had given me an immense cat, named Astoulla, which was trying to tear my face. I awoke at eleven the next morning, completely disenchanted.

* * * * * *

In the evening I was alone upon the terrace at the back of my house, when a horrible-looking old woman suddenly entered from the lower door.

"Are you brave?" she said.

I smiled with that self-conceit which a man always feels when asked such a question. She continued:

"I came to propose to you a walk. It is night. No one can see us. You are to follow me. When half-way I shall blindfold you, but you must promise me not to attempt to find out where I am leading you."

I promised. The day, you see, had passed over my

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fears, the effects of the nightmare were, little by little, fading away, and I heard that persistent voice still singing in my ear: "Nissa! Nissa!" The old woman evidently came from her. I hurried up to my room and got a small revolver. Five minutes later we were on our way. It was mad—absurd; I confess it freely. But there are follies which one does not stop to reason.

When we had come to the Djoulffa Bridge the old woman stopped and took from her pocket a thick handkerchief, which she proceeded very deftly to bind over my eyes. I could see no longer. Then she grasped my hand, and I allowed her to lead me. By the increased coolness of the air I conjectured that we were crossing the river. In a few seconds the old woman turned to the right, but we were not quitting the banks of the Zend-Dehroud. I could hear its turbulent waters rolling by and breaking for an instant against the arches of the bridge. At last my guide paused, a key grated, and in a whisper she said:

"Go up."

Five steps only, and then I felt my feet were pressing a soft, thick carpet. At the same moment she removed the handkerchief. I found myself in a small room, dimly lighted by a copper lamp. Incense was burning in a richly-chased censer resting upon a table of red and green mosaic, and filling the room with those Oriental odours which intoxicate one like the fragrance of old wine.

Against the walls, hung with yellow cashmere, were musical instruments, and here and there arms in the midst of pendant chains and necklaces. From below came the dull and regular murmuring of the river. By lifting a little drapery from the window, I saw that the water touched the very walls of the house. Almost immediately I heard a light rustling upon the carpet. I turned.

It was Nissa. I was transformed with astonishment. She could not have been more than seventeen or eighteen. Her thick, dark hair fell upon perfectly formed neck and shoulders, and her face, slightly amber in colour, had all the changing lights of mother-of-pearl. But I was especially struck by the strange contrast between the exceeding whiteness of her teeth and the blackness of her eyes. The eyelashes, the tips of the lids, and her lips were painted. She smiled as she gazed at me with her still and burning eyes. I thought of the Aga's words, and said to myself that this woman could not easily be frightened. However, she took my hand and made me sit upon the divan.

"My husband has started for Teheran," she said, and smiled.

Then she struck a little gong with a copper rod, and coffee was brought in. She began to talk rapidly, telling me that her life was very dreary and that she had been interested in me at first sight. I was beginning to lose my head, when I heard a noise in the adjoining room. In an instant she sprang up and stood erect and trembling. Her welcome and her sudden fear had followed each other so rapidly that I had no time to analyse my feelings. She ran to the wall, took down a slender little dagger, and half-concealed it in her sleeve. She turned to me, and, with an emphatic gesture, said: "Wait!" Then she vanished behind the heavy hangings.

A vague fear stole over me. I recalled the Aga's warnings. Possibly I had been imprudent. Suddenly I again heard a noise in the next room; there were sounds of voices, then a short struggle, at last silence. At once the drapery was pushed aside, and Nissa reappeared. She was very pale—as pale as the pearls upon her neck.

She half-leant against the wall, looking like a white statue against the background of yellow drapery. She was still smiling, and in her smile revealing teeth as sharp as those of a young wolf. She took a few steps into the room. Her knife and hands were red.

"Good Heavens! What has happened?" I exclaimed.

"Nothing," she replied.

She tossed the dagger into a corner, and, with perfect calmness, said:

"It was my husband. He would have killed us: I preferred to anticipate him. Come, help me throw his body into the water."

I remained motionless, gazing at her in astonishment. Then she fixed her eyes upon me with an expression of complete contempt, and, in a tone that I shall never forget, said:

"Oh, these Frankish dogs! What nervousness!"

She shrugged her shoulders and called a maid, whom she commanded to open the window. Then, as if they were doing the most ordinary of acts, they lifted the body and dropped it into the river. The adventure was becoming too Oriental for me. I confess that I was seized with a wild terror. Without waiting longer, I ran away like a madman. Where I went I have no idea. In ten minutes I found myself in the city, and I ran through the streets as if pursued by a legion of devils. When I had reached my apartments I fastened myself in with a double lock.

What a night! I did not sleep till morning, and then my sleep was like lead. When I awoke the sun was high and streaming into my chamber. I was completely unstrung. What would happen? A man could not disappear without the law's taking cognisance of the affair. Nissa had not even made an attempt at concealment. The servant had seen and aided her. I should be implicated, and at the very idea of being associated with a crime I felt my hair standing on end with horror.

All that day I remained in the same condition, keenly anxious, and not daring to go out. The evening came and still I had formed no resolution, and no news yet of Nissa. Had she been arrested? What had become of her? I retired early, but could not sleep. On the second day I could endure it no longer, and decided to see my friend, the Aga. I arrived at his palace about noon. I was announced, and then entered. The Aga was reclining upon a divan, peacefully smoking his *chibouk*.

"Ah, it is you," he said, when he saw me. "Have you heard the news?"

"The news—the news? No, I have heard nothing."

"You remember Astoulla, the rich merchant, Nissa's husband, whom I told you about?"

It was all over; the crime was known. I muttered an almost inaudible "Yes."

"The poor fellow," continued the Aga, "my dear friend, he has suddenly disappeared."

And the Aga looked at me intently. I could bear it no longer. I was about to confess everything when he said:

"He was just setting out for Teheran, and suddenly—vanished. Nothing has been heard of him."

For the second time the Aga looked into my face. There was a short silence. Then, puffing out a long thread of smoke, he added calmly:

"God is great!"

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The Lute with Silver Strings

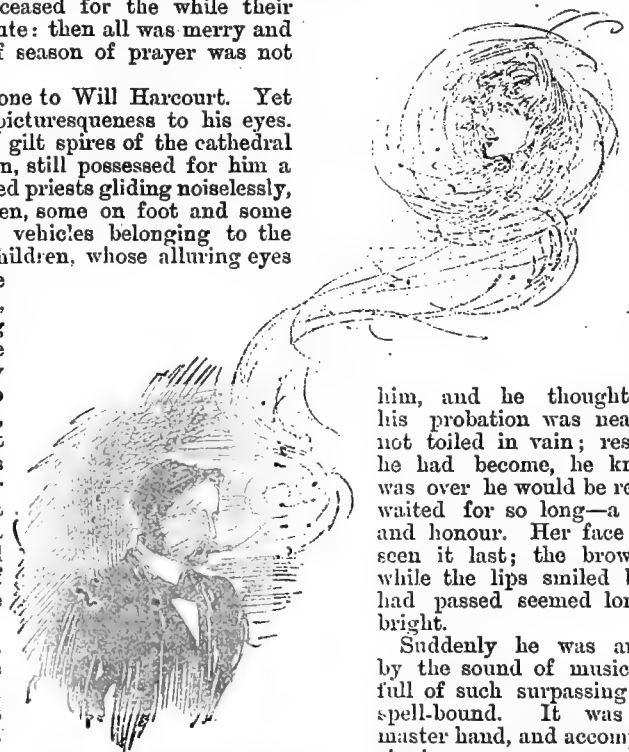
ONE! two! three! The soft-toned bells in the cathedral peeled forth the Angelus, and for a brief space the restless life of the city was still. Men stood with uncovered heads, women in prayerful attitude; even the little beggar children ceased for the while their importunities. Only a minute: then all was merry and noisy again. Yet the brief season of prayer was not without its influence.

The scene was a familiar one to Will Harcourt. Yet it had not lost its extreme picturesqueness to his eyes. The low adobe houses, the gilt spires of the cathedral glistening in the evening sun, still possessed for him a peculiar charm. Black-robed priests gliding noiselessly, gaily-dressed men and women, some on foot and some in the gorgeously liveried vehicles belonging to the aristocracy, little beggar children, whose alluring eyes never failed to coax the desired coin from his pocket, passed him, all hurrying to the plaza, from which the strains of the band already floated. There all the gossip of the day would be retailed, business discussed, Jesuit plots unfolded, and lovers obtain a sight of their *inamoratas*, a smile, a rosebud, or perhaps even a hastily-whispered word should the watchful eye of the duenna be for the moment turned away.

Will Harcourt, however, was not thinking of the dark-eyed maids of Mexico, fair as they seemed. Against their smiles and fascinations he was proof. Truth to tell, a little maid in Devonshire held his heart, and his thoughts, his love, his work, were all for her. The story was a common one. They had met, loved, agreed to marry; but adverse circumstances, in the shape of financial difficulties, prevented, and they parted, Harcourt seeking Mexico, where he hoped to make his fortune. And it was upon this he was musing as he stopped at the post-office for his weekly letter, which was handed him with a smile by the courteous official.

All of Harcourt's friends knew of his hopes and sympathised with him, while they admired the sturdy faithfulness and honour which made him true in every thought to the lady of his love and blind to the allurements of the gay Mexican city.

He was still thinking pleasantly of his letter as, the evening meal over, he settled down in the cool *patio* to smoke. Good-humouredly refusing all invitations of his friend to "come out and enjoy himself," he felt rather relieved when that gentleman took his departure for his usual evening tour of the city. Mr. Swain had fallen an easy victim to the Southern beauties, and clandestine appointments, as well as skilful eludings of duennas, were with him a speciality.



Her face rose before him as he had last seen it.

Harcourt's meditations were exceedingly agreeable. Pacing slowly up and down the court, scenes and memories, brought to mind by the letter he had just received, crowded upon him, and he thought with satisfaction that his probation was nearly at an end. He had not toiled in vain; respected and prosperous as he had become, he knew that before the year was over he would be re-united to the girl he had waited for so long—a man she might well love and honour. Her face rose before him as he had seen it last; the brown eyes filled with tears, while the lips smiled bravely. The years that had passed seemed long and dark, the future bright.

Suddenly he was aroused from his musing by the sound of music, far away yet near, and full of such surpassing sweetness that he stood spell-bound. It was a lute touched by a master hand, and accompanied by a woman's voice singing—common enough in Mexico, but Harcourt had never before heard lute or voice like this.

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He glanced round. The door that led to the street was open, and the great dog lay peacefully in the passage. The sound did not come, then, from any serenading party, and as it continued he noted that it came muffled, as if through walls.

On the left was the city prison. It could not come from there. On the right was a deserted dwelling, the former home of one Don José Flores, who, in a passion of jealous rage, had stabbed a rival and fled from justice to the mountains, where he had become the leader of a dangerous gang of bandits. The house and property had been confiscated, and the government seal was still on the gates. Yet the music seemed to come from this direction, and he heard it more plainly when he paused in front of an unused door, covered now by a luxurious rose-vine, but which he knew connected with the passage leading to the Flores garden.

He stood still and listened. Soft and sweet came the sounds, thrilling him in every nerve. Something impelled him to follow them, and he pushed aside the tangled vine, opening with some difficulty the door, which turned slowly on its iron hinges.

As he had surmised, it led into a passage connecting with the neighbouring garden, which was surrounded by a high iron fence, and filled with overgrown vines and bushes. No light came from the house, but he could hear the sound more plainly now, and, guided by it, he pushed open a door, then stood back amazed at his own temerity.

The door opened softly. As he had guessed, it corresponded to the one in his own house, and led into the *patio*.

The place was dark, except at one end, where a quaint silver lamp was fastened into the angle of the adobe wall. The perfume of roses came to him, and palms and potted plants were arranged round the sides, all speaking of habitation of the place which was supposed by every one to be deserted.

Nor was this all. The light from the lamp fell upon a woman, who half reclined on a couch covered with panther-skins. It was she whose voice Harcourt had heard, and it came to him sweetly and clearly now as he stood there, unable to move hand or foot.

Her clinging robe of black, confined at the waist by a silver chain, left revealed the beauty of her neck and arms, and the lamp, as it flickered and flared in the draught, gleamed on the red-gold of her hair like a living flame. Her long, black lashes lay like shadows on her cheek as she sat, with head bent a little forward, picking at the lute she held.

Harcourt, unable to take his eyes from her beauty, felt a strange sensation creeping over him as he stood silent in the shadow. Something warned him to retrace his steps, yet he felt powerless to do so. Suddenly, as if to make the decision for him, the door behind him blew to with a resounding slam, and the lady started up.

Fearing that she might be alarmed, Harcourt stepped quickly forward.

"Pardon me," he said in Spanish. "I heard the singing and something urged me to seek the singer. For my intrusion, fair one, you must blame this," and he touched the lute which lay on her knees, then stopped, astonished at himself. For three years he had not spoken in this strain to any woman.

The light from the lamp fell upon a woman who half reclined on a couch covered with panther-skins.

She raised her eyes. They were dark as midnight, soft as the velvet pansy leaves, tender, compelling, inscrutable. From the moment Harcourt looked into their liquid depths, he knew but one desire, and that, never to look away.

"Intrusion? No," she answered; "you are welcome, for I know you, Don Guillermo, and have often watched you. It is lonely here."

"Then may I stay," he asked persuasively, "and hear you sing again?"

She drew aside her skirts and made room for him beside her. "I am Amorita Flores," she told him, "the sister of Don José. Sometimes I am with him and sometimes I am compelled to remain here, but must keep it secret. It is a dreary life, señor. I would die if it were not for my lute."

Harcourt did not answer. Leaning back against the panther-skins, he gazed dreamily into the star-set sky. A vision of Madeline floated across his mind, and with a sudden resolution, he started up, but encountering the eyes of Amorita, he hesitated, then sank slowly back again.

"It is a relic," she went on in her soft, languorous voice; "it belonged to a troubadour, and 'tis said that when he willed he could draw the hearts of men and maids from their breasts by its sweetness. See, the strings are all of silver, not one has ever broken. 'Tis said that when one breaks the spell goes also."

"A dangerous weapon," said Harcourt lightly; "yet I court the danger. Sing again."

Smiling, she touched the strings, while Harcourt sat with half-closed eyes, his hand, which had fallen on her shoulder, resting there unrebuked. He felt a sort of faint surprise at himself, but it was dim and far away. He was content to be beside this beautiful woman in the soft Mexican night. Past and future all faded—he was passive to her charming.

Her voice died away in a sweet, lingering note, and the lute slid softly to the ground. She leant nearer, until her silky hair brushed his face. His hand crept

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round her neck, and, emboldened by her silence, he bent and kissed her throat.

Her lids drooped, but Harcourt started up suddenly, resolutely throwing off the spell. He pushed her from him.

"No, I will not!" he exclaimed. "By Heaven, Madeline, I will not!"

Amorita also rose. Unheeding his violence, she stretched her white arms out languidly, and let them fall slowly about his neck, looking full in his eyes. One moment she kept him thus; the next he held her closely in his arms, while their lips met in a long, passionate kiss.

* * * * * *

Ralph Swain had, for some time past, noticed a change in his friend. He was abstracted and reticent, and looked worn and haggard, yet he declared that he was in perfect health, and seemed to resent any remarks upon his appearance.

One day, when they were standing in the store talking to a friend of Swain's, Don Juan Gonzales, a woman of wonderful beauty passed the door. Swain, always eager to view a pretty face, craned his neck to look after her.

"Jolly pretty woman that!" he said regretfully; "wonder I haven't seen her before."

Gonzales laughed, then turned suddenly grave.

"Turn your eyes away from her, my friend," he said. "That is Amorita, the witch, the fiend, the ruin of Flores. It is said that by obtaining new victims she keeps him in funds. It is certain that no one who once gets into her toils can resist her, and many a man has died for her perfidy. There is something about her that makes a man believe in her until he finds her out. I know to my sorrow, for she ruined my faith in women. I wonder where she is staying, and who her latest victim is."

A gasp from Harcourt drew the men's attention to him. He stood against the counter, breathing heavily, his face ghastly white.

Swain sprang to his assistance. "What is it, old fellow?" he asked anxiously.

Harcourt assured him that it was a sudden faintness produced by the heat; then, meeting the keen gaze of Gonzales, he blushed deeply. Swain thought no more of the incident, but Don Juan turned away, with a cynical smile, murmuring: "La Belle Amorita."

Truth to tell, Will Harcourt, from the time he first opened the door leading to the Flores garden, had lived in a very inferno of torment. Possessed by an evil infatuation for the beautiful singer, his days were spent in remorse over his unfaithfulness to Madeline—whose letters lay unread and unanswered—and a determination to redeem his lost honour and free himself from the toils of the enchantress. But, no matter what he might resolve, when night fell and the silvery strains of the lute came softly through the adobe walls, he would hasten to the garden of Amorita. In her presence his doubts disappeared, but only to assail him with redoubled force when daylight came again, and he was forced to undergo the routine of his business.

The money he had carefully saved for Madeline was lavished upon Amorita. He believed what she told him, and, urged by her not to betray her hiding-place, he guarded the secret so jealously that even Swain never doubted him, but continually jested him about his "hermit-life" and his fidelity to Madeline. When he repeated to Amorita Gonzales' story she weepingly denied its truth, and at the sight of her lovely eyes, filled with tears, Harcourt was ready to kill the man who had traduced her.

Time went on, until at last one day Will Harcourt awoke to the fact that he was ruined. A cheque given by him in payment of a bill had been refused at the Bank of Mexico. All the money he had toiled for had been cast in the lap of the syren. So far he had been able to keep his secret from his friend, but now that would be impossible, and, after a long day of conjecture, he resolved to bring matters to a crisis.

He would throw himself at the feet of Amorita, beg her to marry him, and then join her brother in the mountains. By this act he knew he would dishonour himself for ever, but it would be better than this double life. Madeline's face rose before him, and he shuddered as he thought of her grief and broken heart. But the face of Amorita—alluring, beautiful, irresistible—drove all other thoughts away, and he determined to follow his desires.

As night drew on, he paced restlessly up and down the *patio*, waiting for the sound of the lute, which was his signal to hasten to her side; but all was silent. Moments, hours, dragged by, and still she did not call him. Finally, devoured by anxiety, he pushed open the hidden door and followed the familiar way into the garden.

The *patio* was silent and deserted, the silver lamp unlit, but the moon, shining bright, showed him the couch at the end, and it was empty.

He called her name. No answer but the echoes came. With growing alarm he searched the house; her lace mantilla lay where she had dropped it, but Amorita was not there.

Returning to the *patio*, he stood bewildered. The palms, the flowers, were the same, the soft grasses strewn on the floor were undisturbed. The faint, subtle perfume which was inseparable from Amorita was in the air, but the lady had vanished.

Something gleaming on the panther skins caught his eye. It was the lute which had first lured him to destruction, pinned through with a small stiletto, and slipped under the strings was a note.

Hastily lighting the lamp, he tore it open and read:

Amigo mio.—I go to the only man I could ever love, my brave José. To you, who have made this possible, I leave the lute you loved to hear, in memory of your generosity. If that fails to compensate, there is the stiletto. *Adios.*

AMORITA.

The paper fell from his hand, rustling softly. The unfilled lamp flickered and went out. There was a sound of shrill discord, then silence.

The first rays of the sun, peeping merrily into the *patio*, fell upon Will Harcourt, stretched upon the couch of Amorita with the dagger in his heart.

Beside him, rent and shattered, its spell gone for ever, lay the lute with silver strings.

N. N.

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A WOMAN ABOVE REPROACH.

"Were you ever in love?" asked Jack Fielding somewhat moodily.

"Yes, sir, many times," said his father, "but I was never a confounded idiot over it."

"Now, look here, Jack," said the Colonel, "don't be silly. The girl may be very pretty; I hope she is.

"However, once for all understand this, I will give neither consent nor countenance to a marriage with this woman. Besides that, she is penniless. If you marry her you must support yourself, and I imagine that when she finds that love in a St. John's Wood villa is to be reduced to love in a dingy lodging, the lady will agree with me."

"It's no good, pater, I love Vera, and shall never love any other woman. I am sorry to disobey you, but a man must choose for himself in these matters. Something will turn up for me to do. We can go abroad——"

"You can go to the dickins!" said the Colonel in a rage.

And Jack put on his hat and went—to see a very pretty woman.

* * * * *

Ten minutes later he had the lady in his arms and was talking nonsense.

Vera is silent for a moment, after he has told her of his father's anger. The sweet lips tremble, and then she says, with the least little quiver in her voice:

"I can only think of one thing, Jack, and that is that you should do as your father wishes and forget me. Though we might be happy in poverty, I couldn't bear to feel that I had cost you wealth, position, and your father's love."

"I shall be well recompensed with you for my wife," says Jack stoutly, "and, after all, something may turn up. Now, sweetheart, let us forget all this, and remember only that we love each other."

And they did.

The next day Jack strolled into his club. There was a letter for him.

"Who on earth is this from? A dun, I suppose. He needn't have troubled. Great Scott! Banknotes! One, two, three, four fifties. Two hundred pounds! Well, this can't be for me. Somebody's put the wrong letter in the envelope." A piece of paper, hitherto unobserved, dropped out.

"Ah, perhaps this will explain. Farewell, fond dream. No, more inexplicable than ever! 'From a Friend.' Who on earth can it be? I give it up. Thompson, another brandy and seltzer, please."

He had an appointment to take Vera to the theatre that night, and, as he was nearly due, he hurried off to his rooms to dress. Then he rushed to tell Vera.

"So you see, my darling," he continued, "we shall be able to get along splendidly. I wonder who sent it?"

"Yes, I wonder," said Vera.

"Let's be off. Why, Vera, you aren't wearing any jewellery to-night."

"I don't think it quite suits this dress."

"Oh, yes, it does. Besides," with a touch of boyish pride, "I like you to beat every one in dress as well as beauty."

"Well, dear," she said, "some of it has gone to be mended, and ——"

Jack looked at her steadily for a moment. Then, suddenly his face flushed. Her jewels gone—the anonymous gift; there would be no doubt about it.

"Vera," he said sternly; "Vera, you have sold them!"

"Sold them? Why, what do you mean?"

"Mean?" he said. "Do you think I am blind? The money I have received. Your jewels gone. Vera, you know what I mean."

"Oh, my dearest," she sobbed, throwing her arms around him, "don't be angry with me. All I have is yours. Are you so proud that you won't let me help you in your trouble? you who have helped me so in mine."

"There, there, sweetheart," he replied tenderly. "don't cry. But you don't understand that a man can't accept such favours, even from the woman he loves."

"But, Jack, most of them were your own gifts."

"The more reason that you should keep them. No, dear, take back this money; no, not another word. and if you want to please me let me see you with all your finery to-morrow. And if it does come to that sort of thing, why," with a grim little smile, "there is my watch or a dozen other things before we think of your trinkets."

"Jack——"

"Now, you don't want me to be angry? No? Then do as I tell you, like a good little woman. All the same, dear, this fresh proof of your love has given me more pleasure than the possession of money ever could."

The following afternoon he again went to his club. Another letter from Vera:

My Dearest Jack,—Since we parted last night I have thought matters over, and can see that I shall only be a burden to you, and that it will be better for us not to see each other again. You will not let me help you, and I who love you will not drag you down to poverty. I cannot write more, save to ask that you will always think kindly of me as one who loved you better than herself. Vera.

P.S.—Do not try to find me. It would be useless, as I am leaving London.

For fully five minutes he sat motionless, his eyes fixedly looking at nothing. His face was pale and haggard; he was as one stunned. Then with an effort he pulled himself together.

He rose to go. Perhaps he might yet be in time to stop her. He hurried down the club steps and came face to face with—his father.

"Good gracious, Jack!" said Colonel Fielding, "what is the matter? You look ghastly. Here '—hailing a hansom—"jump in and come home. In you get."

"Vera has left me," said Jack despairingly.

"What, already!" asked the cynical old man. "Well, I won't say 'I told you so,' but I did nevertheless."

"Ah," said Jack, "but it was not for the reasons you suppose. No one can accuse her of such motives."

"Well, well, we won't say they were bad motives. But why did she leave you?"

"Because she wanted us to be reconciled, and she would not be a burden on me now my allowance had ceased, and I was practically penniless."

"Practically penniless? Well, she must have been jolly extravagant if she got through that two hundred so soon."

"What two hundred?" cried Jack. "What do you mean?"

"Why," replied his father, "the two hundred pounds I sent you anonymously to the club the day after our little tiff."

R. L. H. C.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PRIVATE.

Perhaps it was partly her fault, or maybe it was all his fault. Anyway, they had just had a quarrel—one of those unpleasant little affairs in which neither one nor the other will give in or acknowledge being in the wrong, but thinks it the duty of the other—equally blameless participant, of course, to first say—"I am sorry." And it was their first quarrel, too.

Then he falls back upon that old resort, and says: "I am going to the club." He gets his hat and coat, and is about to open the door, when she half repents, and asks him not to go, but to stay at home with her "at least one evening in the week." But he is either obstinate to her appeal or does not hear her, for he closes the door with a bang and leaves her alone, to return, perhaps at midnight, perhaps at dawn. Then she takes the usual course—throws herself into a lounge and cries.

He goes directly to the club. There he meets a few of his friends, and they sit down for a smoke, preparatory to the night's excitement at the whist table. Thus they sit for perhaps half an hour, when the entrance of a rather fat individual seem to create quite a commotion among the smokers.

He is besieged on the right and left to come and join them in their smoke, and Robert Langdon wonders who this rather stout individual who enjoys such popularity can be.

"Major Hunt, one of the most capital story tellers we have had for some time," answers one of his friends in reply to a laughing query from Langdon. "Wait until you hear one of his stories, and you will think so, too."

"Major, this is my friend Langdon."

The Major has hardly made himself comfortable before he is asked to tell one of his stories, and after a while yields to the intreaties of the crowd, and begins:

"There is not an army post in India, nor in the world, which has not some little romance interwoven with its history. But one which I especially remember is one in which the faithfulness of woman, as I will call it, played such an important part as to fix the story in my mind for ever.

"It was about five years ago, at an Indian fort, that this incident occurred. We had there a young private. I never did find out exactly where he came from, and I have even forgotten his name now. He seemed to be an indifferent sort of fellow, rarely joining the rest of the men in their larks, and keeping pretty much to himself. He was a handsome young man, too, nearly six feet tall, if I remember correctly. It was his mysterious manners which made us wonder what he did with himself during his spare moments—that is, when his time was not required by the Government.

"We tried in vain to find out. All that we could ever learn of him was that he was always in his mess room during these intervals, and his companion soldiers there said: 'He reads and reads all the time,' that's all. Army life did not seem to agree with him very much, and we could not see why he ever entered into it. Still there was no one with nerve enough to ask the questions we were so anxious to have answered. He was the one mystery of the fort. Perhaps you will wonder why we officers should take any interest in a common private but before I have finished you will see why that was.

"What was also a mystery to us was how he had managed to become well enough acquainted with the quartermaster's daughter to be seen occasionally out walking with her. Her name, you must remember distinctly, is Genevieve Hutle. She was the belle of the fort. I believe there was hardly a man in that fort at that time who would not have stood any torture if she had so wished—but don't be alarmed, gentlemen. No such thought would have ever entered that girl's mind.

"And then she was very beautiful. Perhaps this had something to do with it. Those among us who had been ill had especial reasons for feeling grateful to her, for as soon as she heard of a case of illness, she seemed to be on pins and needles until she received consent from her father to nurse the sick one, whether he was officer or private. In truth, her kindness and charitableness to all made adorers out of half the men in the fort, and the other half were dead in love with her.

"Now to get down to the story. One day there came the announcement that the natives in our district contemplated a rising, and that the men should be got in readiness to leave at almost any moment. One morning the command came, and a troop of cavalry was detailed to go out, and, if possible, bring them in. The matter had now taken a serious turn, for the few who had started the depredations on a small scale had been joined by the others, until several hundred of them had gone into camp. It happened that the 'mysterious private's' troop was the one detailed to go out first on a sort of a reconnoitring trip, and if on investigation it was thought necessary to send out more men, they were to return for reinforcements.

"It was a busy scene at the fort that morning. Soon the bugle sounded, the men leapt into their saddles and moved up to the gate of the fort. It was a proud moment for the soldiers who composed that troop, for it was their first actual expedition after an enemy. Then came the sound of the bugle again, and the men were off, with the cheers of their comrades ringing in their ears.

"We in the fort had many anxious hours that day and night, though we little thought that there would be any serious results. They would probably return, we thought, with the whole band as prisoners.

"During the night a terrible storm set in, however, and we kept watch to see if they would give up the chase on this account and return to the fort. But no. The night passed away, and dawn still showed no trace of the men. The storm seemed to become more furious with the advent of the day.

"Then misgivings regarding the safety of the men

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began to take form. We had now almost forgotten about the natives, and our only thoughts were of the men, and how they would manage to return to the fort in this terrible storm. About noon there was a lull in the wind, and couriers were sent out to see if any traces of the troop could be found. They might be wandering a few miles outside the fort, we thought, unable to find their way in. The searchers returned, however, after a fruitless search, saying that it was impossible to find any trace of them.

"About three o'clock in the afternoon, however, we were rewarded in our watch by seeing a dark mass to the west, and as it drew nearer a shout went up from the watchers, as we recogni-ed our missing troop.

"When the men rode into the fort again, they were plied with questions as to what they had done during the terrible storm. But the queries were cut short by the announcement that they had been pursued by at least three hundred natives, who had poured bullets into the little troop for awhile, and that one man was missing altogether.

"Then for the first time we noticed that many of the men were covered with blood. They had not been out of the fort five hours, they said, when they were attacked most unexpectedly, for they had no idea that the natives were so near the fort. They seemed to have been waiting for them, for their retreat back was cut off by half the band, while the rest kept up a fire on them from ambush.

"They managed to get out of it without the loss of any men, however. A hot fire had been kept up on both sides while the retreat lasted, and several of our men had been wounded. The natives gave up the chase when the storm set in. The 'mysterious private' was missed when the troops emerged from a strip of wood about twenty miles from the fort. He was wounded during the fight, and had evidently dropped from the ranks through exhaustion. While the men were telling this, we stood about and wondered what could be done to find the poor fellow, who had now undoubtedly passed into another world.

"The storm had again commenced with seemingly added fury, and we realised what a dangerous undertaking it would be for any one to set out with the intention of finding the poor fellow's body. We retired to our quarters, after hearing no end of narrow escape stories from some of the privates, to await orders from the commandant as to the next move.

"We had all given up the idea of going after the body by nightfall—that is, all but one.

"Before the time for rising the next morning, there came to my ears the loudest cheering, mixed with shouts, that I have ever heard in my lifetime. I hastily put on my clothes, and ran out to see what was up. Near the gate I found almost the entire population of the fort, so it seemed to me, most of them engaged in cheering and shouting over something. Before I reached the crowd it parted, and two persons rode towards me—the 'mysterious private' and Genevieve Hutle. As she passed me, standing almost rooted to the spot with surprise, she called out: 'Pleasant morning, Major,' just as though she had come in from a morning's pleasure ride.

"Genevieve had actually ridden out of the fort at dawn to find the young scamp, who did not seem to be hurt at all—save for a few scratches such as the rest of the troop received. She had met him, fortunately, riding towards the fort, or God knows what might have become of that brave girl. It surprised me a little, perhaps, to see her so happy after such a dangerous undertaking. But that was, of course, natural then, as I did not know what passed between them during the ride.

"During the absence of the young fellow one of his comrades had cheek enough to examine his effects—to find out who he was and notify his relatives of his death, as he said, but, as I believe, to see what it was that kept him so busy during the evenings. But the stories the man expected to tell of what he found are still untold, for there were 'only a lot of books, principally law books, newspapers, clippings of testimony in trials, and a lot of other useless trash,' as he expressed himself. What the fellow was doing with these was more than he could imagine.

"Well, as you have, perhaps, already guessed, they both left us a few months later. I think he was pretty well tired of military life. He went to England, I believe, taking the belle of the fort with him. I have strong reasons to believe that this was settled during that ride into camp again. I heard of him once since then. One of his friends at the fort said he had quite a big practice."

"What's the matter, Langdon? Not going already, are you? The story did not affect you so seriously, did it? Why, man, I actually believe there are tears in your eyes."

"Well, no—but—I really have to go now. I have an appointment at home, and must go now, or I shall be late."

* * * * * *

Whether Robert Langdon had an appointment at home or not does not matter much. Sufficient to say that he did go directly home, where he found his wife on the lounge, just where she had thrown herself as he left to go to the club. A sob greeted him as he approached her.

"Genevieve, can you forgive me? It was all my fault, and, if you'll forgive me, I'll never do it again."

She turned up her tear-stained face to him, and he bent over and kissed her, wondering how it ever entered into him to be so cruel.

"No, it was not your fault; it was mine. I actually drove you to that horrid club, when I know you don't care to go there."

"Well, we will not fight about that just now. Do you remember Major Hunt at the fort? I heard him tell a story at the club to-night—a story of how a young girl, a few years ago, rode out to rescue a man who had stayed from his troop, and how she brought him in, safe and sound. Shall I tell it to you? I remember it word for word."

"No, you need not; and if you're not going to stop your never-ending talk about that I am just going to get cross again."

He stopped.

PAUL ROPER.

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THE TALE OF A CRIME.

M THEODORE, *chef de sûreté*, sat in his cabinet deeply perplexed, his two elbows on his desk, his head on his hands. He was musing.

And was it going to last, this, which had been going on for so long a while? And these assassins, were they going to end by beating him? Were they going to compel him, by adverse public opinion, to send in his resignation?

Eight assassinations, one after another! Crimes of the worst calibre, with startling details, which peopled alike with horrifying visions the sleep of the bureaucrat and the *concierge*. And not an assassin, for all their skilful work, had they been able to lay their hands upon.

And now, to top-off these eight other crimes, there was still another, a ninth one—a murder like the others, accomplished the evening before under similar conditions, a woman with her throat cut, five thousand francs' worth of jewels gone, and—not a trace of the assassin!

"Nine murders, one after the other; nine crimes without an author; nonsense! impossible!"

The *chef de sûreté* pulled himself together, threw back his head like a war-horse sniffing battle, and—the door opened.

It was his secretary who presented himself, bearing a card in his fingers.

"A gentleman, monsieur, who insists on seeing you. He declares," and the secretary smiled a little at the absurdity of the idea—"he declares himself in a position to furnish you with definite particulars regarding the crime of yesterday."

"Ah, the crime of yesterday!" The chief turned quickly. "Then bid him enter," said he, and while the secretary regained the ante-room to do his bidding, M. Theodore cast his eye on the card before him.

"Frederick Bouscal," he read in a half-voice. "Bouscal, Bouscal; it seems to me that I know that name—that I've heard it somewhere."

He scrawled a line upon a scrap of paper and handed it to the secretary, who returned at the moment ushering in the visitor who had asked to see him, dismissed him with a word, and was immediately ready for the matter in hand.

M. Theodore raised his eyes. Before him was a man simply but neatly dressed, and with a frank and honest countenance, though veiled as by a cloud with a profound sadness.

"You have particulars to give me, have you not, monsieur?" questioned the *chef de sûreté*; "particulars, I believe, of the crime of yesterday?"

"It rests with you, M. le Chef, whether I am sure or not. All depends, in fact, upon an operation, the means of which you alone are able to furnish me."

"Explain, if you please."

"Certainly, and at once, though doubtless you have heard it spoken of, M le Chef; a certain scientific procedure which permits under certain conditions, better even than description can do it, a reproduction of the portrait of an assassin.

"You know, of course," he continued, "that in the phenomenon called vision, the object which we see throws or forms upon a screen in the eyeball itself—in plain words, upon the retina of the eye—an image which remains there until displaced by another. It has been proved, also, that this image continues even after death.

"You recognise, therefore, that if a person murdered has been struck from the front, and in a light sufficiently distinct for him to see, the last thing upon which his eyes would be fixed would, in all probability, be the face or form of the murderer.

"Naturally, the image of that face or figure would be thrown upon the retina of the eye, where—and this is what I came to say—it is not only possible to refind it, but also possible to reproduce it. Ah, well, Monsieur, in the case which occupies us——"

The door of the cabinet opened anew, and the secretary of M. Theodore re-entered, holding in his hand a roll of papers, which he laid before his chief, then turned and was gone again as quickly as he had come. M. Theodore lifted it and ran his eye rapidly over the contents.

"You are named Frederick Bouscal, are you not, Monsieur?" he demanded presently, addressing his visitor.

"Yes, M. le Chef, Frederick Bouscal——"

"Your age?"

"Fifty-eight years, M. le Chef."

"Hum—m—m!" M. Theodore rapidly twirled the sheets beside him. "So it was you, then, who was imprisoned two years ago, and condemned for contumacy and the theft of 1,000 florins?"

"No, Monsieur," he responded, with an effort, in a dull voice; "no, it was not I—it was—my son!"

"An *employé* of the Credit Agricole, was he not? And—you are ignorant of what has become of him?"

"Absolutely. It is fifteen months that his mother and I have been without news of him. That child, M. le Chef, that child has been our sorrow and our shame. He has broken our hearts, plunged us in grief, dishonoured our name——"

"Pardon me, Monsieur," said the *chef de sûreté*. "I have re-opened a painful wound! But I listen to you—you were saying——"

The man passed his hand across his brow and eyes to clear his vision, then resumed:

"I was saying, M. le Chef, that in the case which occupies us now the reproduction of the assassin's portrait should be entirely possible. The victim was struck in the face; the direction of the blow and the form of the wound indicate it plainly.

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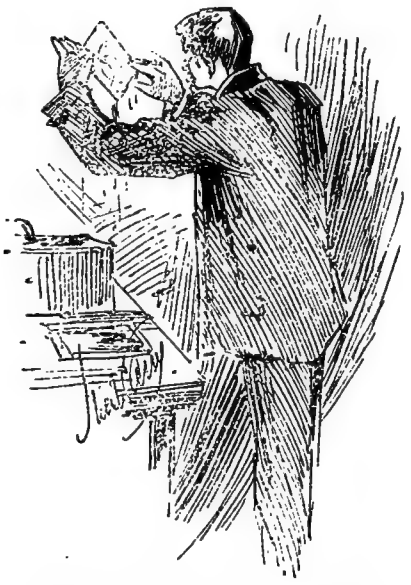
"Thus, Monsieur, we find ourelves in the presence of a half certainty. It is probable, if not sure, that the eye of the corpse now lying upon the slab of the morgue contains the exact reproduction of the features of the



Took it carefully by its dripping edges.

one you seek. With your permission I will draw it from them."

"Draw it; but how?"

"By photography—it is my business, M. le Chef. And this matter, this subject I speak of, I have studied it long, and almost with passion, for I hold it to be, in case of success, one of the most useful and beautiful applications of modern science. I have myself experimented, and in one instance have reproduced the lineaments of the physician who had leaned above the bed of the dying."

"And you conclude——?" questioned M. Theodore, after a moment's thought.

"I conclude——but authorise me to attempt the experiment on the woman assassinated yesterday, and I will tell you what I conclude. If I succeed it will be for us—my wife and myself—a little glory, and also a little money—a ray of hope in our misery; if I fail—well, no matter—we are used to misfortune."

"Then so be it, monsieur," agreed the *chef de sûreté*.

In the obscure nook at the morgue, where he had inclosed himself in accordance with the arrangements made at the office of the *sûreté*, Frederick Bouscal, his body bent, his face drawn, watched anxiously the result of his last washing. The plate was there before him in its bath of quicksilver, into which he had dropped it a while ago with such fear and infinite precaution.

His throat closed as by a grip of iron; the operator held himself immovable, hearing only with painful distinctness the gurgle of the water as it dripped upon the faces of the dead in the adjoining chamber—the plunge of his blood as it throbbed and hammered through the arteries of his heart.

And at last the moment came—the moment that was to reveal to him all or nothing. He rose, took it carefully by its dripping edges—that plate upon which his fate was hanging—half closed his eyes, held it to the single ray of light that filtered through the yellowed pane, to stagger back with a groan of anguish, and let it crash into a thousand pieces.

His son! Good Heavens! The face of the murderer—the face of his son!

Five minutes later, when Frederick Bouscal, the photographer, came from his nook, and the *chef de sûreté*, awaiting him with impatience, hurried to meet him, he saw immediately by the pallor of his face, by his sombre eyes, that he had nothing pleasant to announce to him.

"Well," said he, "what success?"

"It's no good."

"Haven't you found anything?"

"No," responded Bouscal, "nothing."

"*Allons!* no matter; try it a second time; do it again."

"Impossible! the transparency of the cornea is destroyed. I wished to wash it, and I burnt it through mistake in the vials. I salute you, M. le Chef!"

The next morning the *commissaire* of the quarter of Ternes, forwarding to the Prefecture his regular report, headed it with the following item:

"To-day, at ten o'clock, a summons to 109, Rue Laugiere. A call from the *concierge*, suspicions of charcoal fumes from the room of the Bouscals, man and wife, his *locataries*. The door, by my order was forced. Too late—they were dead, both of them, side by side upon the bed, a brazier of lighted charcoal plainly indicating the manner of their death. A double suicide; poverty was the cause."

They were both dead, side by side upon the bed.

"Bah! these inventors," murmured M. Theodore, as his secretary concluded the reading, "they are all alike; stupid and rash; but how could I think of suicide for a cause so trifling as this!"

LE VIER.

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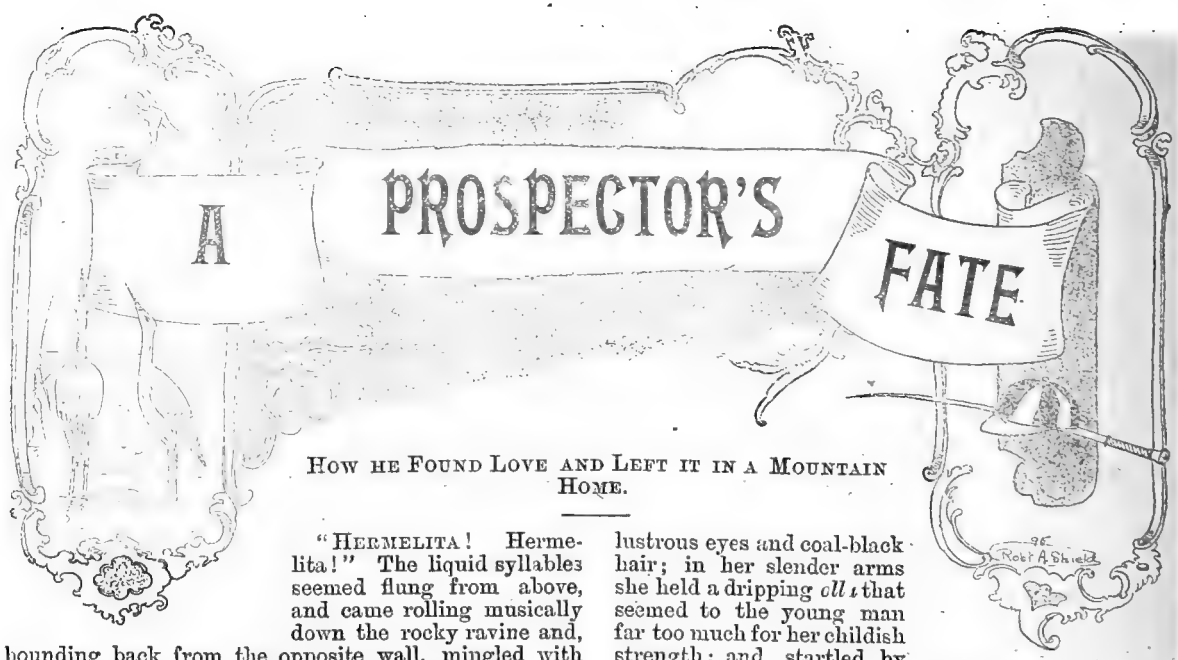

How he Found Love and Left it in a Mountain Home.

"Hermelita! Hermelita!" The liquid syllables seemed flung from above, and came rolling musically down the rocky ravine and, bounding back from the opposite wall, mingled with the joyous brawl of the torrent, sharing the pass with the road-bed. "Hermelita!" Both man and horse started at the sound of a woman's voice in these barren solitudes.

Since morning Cyril Wainwright had been picking his way through cañons and over ridges towards the brother peaks, San Bernardino and San Gorgonio, whose hoary forms seemed from the valley below to stand shoulder to shoulder. It was two days since he had left the quaint Spanish city of the Angels, equipped for a prospecting tour in the ranges piled up at the eastern end of the valley. It was twelve hours since, with horse and pack *burro*, he had trotted out of the tiny settlement of Lugonia and struck out for the base of the mountains.

After his first plunge into the foothills, he had not passed a sign of habitation, and now he had even lost sight of the glittering snow-crowns he had chosen for his beacon; the defile he was traversing gave glimpses of nothing save sky, and rock, and streamlet.

Wainwright was accustomed to solitude. Had he not spent eight lonely months in the wilds of Montana, and lately crossed the deserts of Southern California quite by himself? His bronzed face bore witness to former exposure, and his outfit bore the stamp of experience; but who would blame him for a joyful start at a woman's voice when he thought himself the only human being?

He pressed forward, still scanning the higher surroundings, expecting that another glance would reveal the habitation of some hill-loving mortal who had taken his abode in these fastnesses; and thus he passed heedlessly a trail to the left that led sharply to the creek, but came a moment later to a steep descent bearing traces of being a ford, albeit one not to the taste of the ordinary traveller.

Passing on to the brink to measure the incline and pick out the obstructions to be avoided in crossing the turbulent, rock-ribbed stream, Wainwright came upon a scene for a painter. On the less precipitous bank opposite stood a veritable elfin maid, tiny and dark, with lustrous eyes and coal-black hair; in her slender arms she held a dripping *olla* that seemed to the young man far too much for her childish strength; and, startled by his approach, she stood eyeing him timidly and yet with half-parted lips as if about to speak.

The girl looked on as if fascinated, while his surefooted nag stepped carefully down the steep bank into the swift, swirling water. The horse moved gingerly but unhesitatingly forward; and the man looked back to see how the pack *burro* he was leading took the torrent. The little creature clambered and slid to the water's edge, then shied suddenly, nearly jerking the prospector from his careless seat.

Just at that moment Sultan's foot must have struck a rolling stone, for the good beast stumbled, recovered, and stumbled again, pitching his rider, not yet firm again in his saddle, into the seething flood. Wainwright's last conscious moment as he plunged downward was filled with: "*Madre de Dios*, the señor will drown!" shrieked in the Spanish tongue; his next with a hazy vision of a boy and girl standing over himself in soaking garments; but a sharp pain darted across his eyes, and, with a groan, he fainted again.

When he did finally come to himself, he was lying in a comfortable bed near a tiny window, through which he caught a glimpse of snowy summits; the rafters crossing over his head were bare but smoothly finished, and there was an air of simple, old-world refinement about the neat room that puzzled him greatly as soon as his scattered wits were concentrated enough for him to remember where he must be. A gentle stream of talk flowed from the adjoining chamber, and, after listening dreamily to the soft foreign words for many minutes, he was attacked by a sudden curiosity to know who were his rescuers.

The groan he uttered was only partly feigned as he turned his face towards the door, and for the first time it struck him that he was severely hurt; but the sound brought Señora Ramona Ramagua to him in an instant. She gave a little cry of pleasure at the light of consciousness in his eyes; and Cyril forgot his pain, as he called eagerly: "Pardon me, señora, but will you be so kind as to tell me to whom I am indebted for hospitality, and how I got here?"

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The matron shook her head, answering him in Spanish: "We speak not the tongue of the Gringos," and the young man put his question again in her own language, adding many expressions of gratitude to his benefactors. The good woman's features, which had set at the sound of the unknown words, softened somewhat.

"The horse fell in the *zanja*, the señor remembers. It was Hermelita, my daughter, and my son Carlos who saved the señor from the water and carried him hither. The boy caught also the señor's mount and the foolish *burro*; they are in the cave barn below."

"But you have not told me your name that I may thank you!" he exclaimed impatiently, and his hostess smiled with indulgent kindness, answering: "The señor may call me Señora Ramona; but now he must rest. It will be many days before he can go on up the mountains."

The Señora Ramagua spoke only too truly. The broken leg and the severe bruises resulting from Wainwright's fall and his being hurled by the angry water against the rocks in the course, took long to heal. It was a wound on the head that had caused him to lie two days in the cottage bedroom, unaware of his surroundings, and even after his limb became strong enough to bear his weight, he still suffered from sudden throbbings and faintness which were its after effects. That would wear away in time, the señora told him, nor would she hear of letting him resume his journey until relieved of all danger of falling from his horse in a dizzy fit.

Meantime the young man made rapid progress in the friendship of the family; before he could leave his bed, the group would gather in his room in the evening, and the señora or Cyril would tell tales, or Carlos would play his guitar and Hermelita would sing—Hermelita, whom Cyril had taken for a child, and whom he found to be a young woman, a Spaniard of the Spaniards—and so, indeed, was her mother. Later on, when he could limp slowly to the door with the aid of a stout stick, they made the verandah their sitting-room, and the long moonlit evenings slipped away swiftly and happily as in an enchanted realm.

Cyril used often to ponder on the oddity of the isolation in which these people lived. Señora Ramagua was a lady, with the culture of the daughters of old Spain; Hermelita was a daughter worthy of such a mother. She might have seemed ignorant to him among his friends in a distant land, but her poise and manner were perfect, and her utter simplicity struck him at times as wonderfully bewitching.

Why had the dead Spaniard made a home for such women among the rocky fastnesses? What manner of man had he been, who, knowing the luxuries of life, had hidden here where only the supplies of the hunter and fishermen were at hand, and where new faces scarcely appeared twice in a twelvemonth?

Hermelita had told him once that, since she could remember, a single trip to Lugonia had been her only journey; and he soon learnt that the señora, at least, was often exceedingly lonely, and that, in spite of the trouble he had caused them, his advent had been a godsend to both mother and daughter, giving them a long craved-for glimpse of the outer world.

Only Carlos puzzled the young man with his wild moods and lowering looks.

When the youth was seized with one of his mad fits, Hermelita and the señora would redouble their pleasantry, striving to smooth over the temporary interruption of their family companionship.

When his demonstrations and dark looks had been too evidently aimed at Wainwright, the señora, after his disappearance, exclaimed in a constrained tone: "The señor must forgive my wayward boy. He is not always master of himself."

Her apparent discomfort made Cyril hastily disclaim any resentment, attributing the lad's sour glances to some slight bodily ailment; but the señora did not avail herself of the polite effort to assist her in passing off a painful matter. The soul of hospitality herself, like all the best of her countrymen, she seemed to feel that an explanation of Carlos' behaviour was due to her guest.

"My boy is the heir of misfortune, señor," she said gravely. "Perhaps my friend does not know, also, that the child is only my foster-son. His father was the friend of my husband; but he carries in his veins the blood of an Indian mother, a woman of the missions. When the Americans came first to California, the Señor Gonzalez confided his son to my care and joined our defenders. He fell, and my husband, the Señor Ramagua, came home wounded, we thought to die. *Ay de mi!* Señor Wainwright, that was a bitter time. He had been happier had he been as his friend. Did not the Gringos confiscate our lands?—all the broad pastures, and the wheat land, and the grove of olives by the creek, where stood the house of his birth.

"Then came we to these mountains; my husband could not bear to leave California, his home; he was proud; he would not go to his relatives, and mine, grandees of Mexico, with empty hands; so he sold the flocks and the herds in Los Angeles, he brought men and built this house, he led hither his wife, myself, and the little Carlos, and my Hermelita, then a baby. Poor little thing! It has been a strange garden for thee, tender flower," and the mother's glance strayed to the child-woman beside her.

"Dear señora, why do you stay here?" cried her other listener. "You say truly it is a strange place for gentle ladies. Your daughter is grown; some day you will wish her to marry. Whom will she meet in these wilds? If, as you say, Carlos is not her brother, in what a position you leave her should harm come to yourself!"

The girl's long lashes swept suddenly over the bright eyes turned upon him, and her head drooped. But the white-haired señora, glancing thoughtfully from her patient to her child, murmured slowly: "It is true; but this is our home. The Los Angeles of to-day would not be the Los Angeles of my girlhood. They are gone—my friends of the old time—to Mexico, to Spain, to the grave. And Carlos—he never could bear to live with strangers."

She stopped and looked again wistfully into the young man's face, then with a sigh went on: "The Señor Ramagua, my husband, hated sorely the Americans; until he died he taught Carlos to hate them. Therefore, forgive him, señor, if he cannot get used to your presence."

"But I am not American, I am English. It does honour to the goodness of your heart that you took me in so freely," said Cyril Wainwright humbly.

"Nay, it is all one. You are a Gringo, you are a stranger. *Madre de Dios!* The good saints would forsake us, had we turned from assisting one sorely wounded! but had all been like Señor Wainwright, there would have been no need for this mountain asylum," exclaimed the warm-hearted woman. "But, Hermelita *mia*, *el Señor* has never told us how he came to take the old ford, passing the new one of Carlos."

Then Cyril gaily explained his absorption on that fatal evening, caused by the fairy voice floating above him; and his elder listener cried, laughing: "Truly, it

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is I who should nurse you, since I am the cause of this misfortune. It was no fay you heard, señor, but a mother calling her child, who seemed bewitched by the creek and brought no water for cooking."

The conversation of that evening cleared up for Wainright much of the mystery surrounding his charming hostess; and the knowledge of Carlos' antecedents added a feeling of distrust to his incipient dislike of the boy. In time he came to understand, moreover, that Carlos' soul burnt with jealousy against the handsome young man.

As his broken bones knit firmly, and the trouble in his head annoyed him less, the young prospector grew restless, and, little by little, began to take short excursions on the slopes and down to the creek. At first, the señora sent Carlos with him, but as his step became firmer, in view of the youth's disagreeable manner, she tacitly consented to Hermelita's taking the office of guide and companion to the invalid. Both the young man and the girl found this arrangement to their liking, and, in the short jaunts his strength permitted, Cyril found means to set chattering the soft voice generally so silent during the evenings on the piazza.

These were halcyon days for the little Spanish maid. Was not the tall stranger fine-looking as an Apollo? And he looked on her so softly, and told her, in her own sweet tongue, of the wonders and glories of his far-off city home! Was it any wonder that she loved him? But it was a long time before the child realised what made the sun shine so brightly and her heart sing when she was baking the cakes.

It was a jealous word from her foster brother that finally opened Hermelita's eyes and showed Cyril the precipice over which he was walking. He was really well at last, and was beginning to call himself a lazy good-for-nothing for quartering himself any longer on these hospitable women; but it was so easy to let the balmy days drift by, it was so pleasant to lie in the hammock in the moonlight and listen to Hermelita's Spanish lullabies.

From one day to another he put off the moment of parting.

He and the girl were sitting side by side, one morning, on a great rock, letting the spray from the bubbling torrent fly over them. He had taken the slim, childish fingers into his; and she sat with drooping head and half-shrinking form, while he tried to find words to tell her at length of his determination to go on to his work.

Carlos, with his gun over his shoulder, came singing up the gulch, swinging a couple of dead birds in his hand. He did not see the twain opposite until he stood ready to leap across. Then he stopped, fairly trembling with rage, his face a study of passion.

"*Caramba!* It is true then, he loves her!" Cyril heard from between the half-breed's clenched teeth, and the lad turned and bounded back among the rocks like a madman.

And Hermelita—she also heard! Snatching her hand from her companion, she sprang to her feet, the hot blood mantling her face; her eyes met his and fell; the next moment she was flying up the steep path to take refuge from her own thoughts before the little shrine in her bedroom. "*Madonna mia*, does he love me?" she cried stretching out her arms, "for I love him! Yes, Blessed Mother, I love him!"

What of Wainwright? Backwards and forwards he limped on the narrow strip of level by the stream-bed, anathematising himself for a villain and a fool. He had seen through it all in a flash: Carlos' jealousy, the mother's wistfulness, tiny Hermelita's unconscious happiness, and the light of awakening in her as she fled from him. And he—he had been so blind, he had worked this mischief so innocently. He paused, and placed side by side before his mind's eye a black-haired, elfin figure and a blue-eyed golden head, shaking his own head, and slowly he murmured: "No, it is Marie I love."

Ten minutes later he stood in the piazza, wringing the hand of Señora Ramagua. "God bless you, and forgive me!" he said huskily. "He knows my last thought would have been to wrong you or yours. Bid Hermelita *adios* for me. She is a child; she will forget."

The mother bade godspeed, with tears running down her furrowed cheeks. The prospector saddled his horse and, leading the little grey mule, pushed steadily up the cañon.

In the evening Hermelita leant against the great rock by the creek, with her head buried in her arms. Carlos, her foster-brother, came behind her, laying a light hand on her shoulder. The girl shuddered and shook him off, and the half-breed's look changed from gloomy tenderness to angry scorn. "Do you love him?" he cried harshly. "You will see him no more; his love lies over the mountains!" then more softly: "Forget him! I too love, Hermelita *mia!* I love you!"

"And you hate him!" flashed back the maiden; "I can never love you, brother Carlos!"

He frowned at her, and walked away.

In the dim dawn Cyril Wainwright rose from his camp-bed and stretched his stiffened limbs, long used to more luxurious quarters. Somewhat relieved from the heavy thoughts of yesterday, he whistled soberly, arranging his chattels and cooking his camp breakfast. The little grey mule raised its head from cropping the short grass and brayed uneasily, and Sultan pricked up his ears, looking at his master. Cyril thought he saw a skulking figure in the tall grass, and stood up for a better examination. There was a sharp click—a sudden report. The prospector flung up his hands and fell forward, his face in the fire.

It was again evening when Carlos Gonzalez walked heavily into the kitchen of his home.

"You are late, my son, and you have been long gone," said the white-haired Señora Ramona, her kind eyes scanning his mask-like features.

"I have hunted long and am weary—and I bring home no game. Have you food in plenty, my mother?"

G. B. M.

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Whoever has passed over the road from Champerico to Quezaltenango has passed through a veritable Eden.

Manuel was the *comprador* of the Finca Saquichilla, near the road to Quezaltenango. He had been to the seaport to superintend the shipping of the stores the steamer had brought for the *finca*, and after this task was completed, the frequent libations of *aguardiente* he had indulged in, to celebrate the fact, had set his hot blood on fire.

The long ride on muleback, after leaving the railway, had somewhat sobered him, but he took no notice of the beauties of the scene he was passing through. Tired, hungry, and ugly, he reached the *finca* as the sun passed behind the old volcanoes, and the shadows of evening were coming over the buildings.

No sooner had he thrown the saddle-bags on the stone floor of the court, and stretched himself to shake out the stiffness of the ride, than his employer, the old German who owned the immense acres, stepped out of the little office with the news of a revolt among the *peons* who were working the separator.

The half-caste who had acted as overseer during Manuel's absence had incurred such hatred by his harshness that the men had set upon him and cut him to death with their knives. Emboldened by the act, they had refused to work all day.

Manuel was no less hated, but the fear he inspired kept him from danger, yet black looks were shot after him by the low-browed, swarthy faces that slaved day in and day out for the bare pittance meted out to them.

Manuel was not a native. His father was an English sailor, his mother a Cuban, and he inherited the strength of one, the fire of the other. He looked upon the low herd under him with undisguised contempt.

His dark eyes fairly flashed their anger when old Metzler told him of the cutting affair. He sprang into his room that opened on the court and took down the great whip with the heavy stock—the one he always carried when standing by the men at work. His pistol was in his belt, where it had been during the ride.

Entering the long, low building, where the dirty, half-naked *peons* were grouped idly about the machinery, whispering ominously, he gave the order to commence work, although it was after the hour to stop.

Not a movement. Only a low growl of resentment from the half-human group, some of whom were already fingering the long sheath-knives at their belts.

One man to forty!

They were casting furtive glances at the Indian, José the leader, as if to catch some signal for action.

"Eh, it is you, is it?" said Manuel "stand out there."

The man did not move. The *peons* pressed closer about him. It was like the hushed air before an impending storm.

The hot blood in the *comprador* was working into a fury of passion. With a quick spring he brought the whip-stock with his full strength down on José's head, and the Indian fell like a log.

The *peons* were cowed. They went to their tasks like whipped curs.

* * * * *

The *aguardiente* had worked out of Manuel's blood. He was quite himself after a hearty meal.

The Indian must not die; he had no wish to do murder. He must be brought from the quarters to the house to have his head sewed up. Manuel's heart was quite melted when Metzler sewed up the great, gaping wound, and he offered to sit up part of the night with the Indian.

José was laid upon a low bed, apparently as unconscious as he had been since receiving the blow. Manuel sat by the window, smoking a cigarette, and looking out on the court. What if the man should die? The candle burnt low, and its dim light conjured up ghosts of the Indian in his mind. The long ride had fatigued him, and soon he was nodding in his chair.

An hour passed. All was quiet about the buildings, save the howl of a dog now and again. The *comprador* was breathing heavily in his deep sleep. The candle had burned out. Something seemed to grip his throat, and he started from his chair, only to find his efforts futile. He was too far gone to resist. It might be only a hideous nightmare.

Twelve o'clock came, and with it came old Metzler to relieve Manuel. He passed into the room and struck a light. Manuel was sitting by the window, his back turned. The old German spoke to the *comprador*, but he did not move. He poked him in the back—no answer. He held the candle by Manuel's face. It was black and purple; about the throat were the bruises made by great, iron fingers. He turned to the bed in the corner—it was empty. José had gone. Manuel was cold and stiff.

J. Craig.

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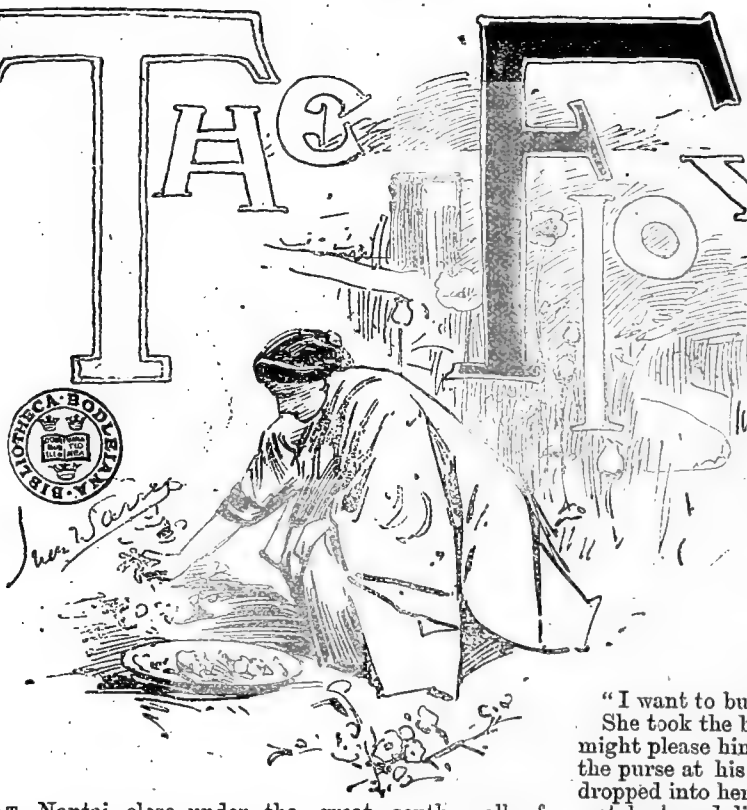
The Flower Girl



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Translated from the Chinese.

At Nantai, close under the great south wall of Fuhchan, lived Suen Moi, the violet girl, in the house of her father, the maker of baskets. But he was old, his hands had lost their skill, and he was like a blind fowl picking at random after worms. They would have been poor had he not been as careful with his cash as a bee with its honey. Suen Moi did not know, so she sold violets that Heaven might bestow upon her the hundred blessings. Her flowers grew in front of the house, which faced the north, and she knew the flowers loved her, because when they blossomed they always turned their heads towards the door.

She called the flowers her children, gave them water when the hot sun tried to scorch them, and kept the weeds away. Every day she picked the best ones and sold them, that her parents might not die poor. Whenever she sold a bunch she always whispered:

"Ni-ho-chi-lok," that they might find comfort in the parting.

"The flowers of Suen Moi have souls," those at the market said. "They know her voice and her touch, and when they pass into strange hands they droop their heads and die."

But Suen Moi said they only wanted water.

She gathered her flowers early in the morning before the sun was up, and she kept them in a basket made of bamboo shoots.

One morning, just as she had finished, a young man stopped at the gate.

"Do you sell flowers?" he asked.

"Yes, honourable sir," and she bowed low, for she knew by his dress that he was a man of rank.

"I want to buy some of you."

She took the basket to him and held it out that he might please himself. He took one flower. Then from the purse at his belt he brought out a coin which he dropped into her hand. It was a long piece of yellow metal shaped like a knife. Upon it were characters which Suen Moi could not understand.

"It is too much," she said like a child that cannot calculate.

"I give it to you because you love your flowers and are good to them," answered the stranger.

She watched him curiously as he walked away, and then she looked at the coin. When she went into the house she showed it to her parents.

"It is very ancient," said her father. "There is one like it in the museum at Fuhchan."

"It is gold," said her mother. "If we had three more we should be rich."

The next morning the stranger came again. He

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came over to where Suen Moi was gathering flowers, and said to her:

"Suen Moi, Suen Moi, give me a flower."

"I have picked the best one for you," she answered, blushing.

"Why have you picked the best one?" he asked.

"Because I know you love flowers too," she answered.

"Do you know you are a flower?" he said.

She hung her head. No one had ever spoken like this to her before.

"You are as beautiful as the flowers," he said. "Your heart is pure and sweet. I love you as you do the flowers."

"The stranger one is at the gate talking to her," said the father to his wife.

"I wonder if he will give her another coin!" she answered. "Perhaps he wants to buy her."

"You are like one who looks at the Heavens from the bottom of a well," he answered.

As he spoke, she went to the door.

"She is bringing him in," she said sharply. "We shall be disgraced."

Suen Moi entered with her basket. The stranger followed. The old couple kneeled and knocked their heads on the floor because they could easily see that he was a man of rank.

"I have come to announce my betrothal to your daughter," he said.

They were so astonished they could say nothing.

"You are not to send her to the market-place to sell flowers. You are to find a sin-shang, who will teach those things which she ought to know."

"But we are poor, honourable sir," said the old woman, who could not help thinking of the knife-shaped coin of gold.

He took from his belt an embroidered purse and laid it on the table.

"You are more wealthy than your neighbours," he said.

Then he went out, while the old woman began counting the coins.

Every day he came at sunrise and stood at the gate, while Suen Moi plucked one violet for him. One day she asked him:

"Where do you live, honourable sir?"

"In the Temple of the Seven Genii," and he pointed towards Fuhchan. "My home is in the Temple, but because you have asked me the question I must go away. When the moon shines bright and round again, I will return."

He walked down the road with the violet in his hand, while Suen Moi walked sorrowfully into the house.

For three days she grieved. The flowers which grew in the garden turned their faces towards the door, as if looking for her, but she did not come to them.

The black monster had laid his hand upon the village. The curse of small-pox raged. It crept like a thief through the gate and up the path between the flower-beds of Suen Moi. It stole into her room, and laid its hand upon her fair forehead, and chained her to her couch. The fever came into her face, then the spots appeared, and, last of all, the marks of the monster's claws. The flowers in the garden knew, and hung their heads in sorrow.

In her delirium Suen Moi found her lover. He had returned, and she was searching for a flower to give him. But they all drooped their head. So she raved:

"Raise up your heads: don't you know that—that——"

She did not know his name. She turned to him.

"I cannot call you 'he,'" she said. "What is your name?"

The blush seemed to come over her face because she was bold, but it was only the fever.

"I am called Wong-Fa," he answered.

"That is the name of the God of the Flowers," she said.

"I am that one," was the reply.

But the memory of all this passed from her.

The black monster has no mercy. It has no soul, so it is continuously searching for human ones. It took the soul of Suen Moi, and left the body for the parents to shed their tears on. But as the soul passed down the path to the gate the flowers raised their heads and demanded it, and it went to them.

When the sun shone on them the next morning a young man stood at the gate waiting for Suen Moi. He had returned. He waited until he saw the white cloth across the door. Then a terror came over him. He walked up the path.

"Where is my betrothed?" he asked of the old woman.

"She died of the scourge last night."

He turned and looked at the flowers.

"You bloom in purple?" he asked softly. "You raise your heads in joy when she who loved you best is dead." He waved his hand gently over them, and they bowed their heads. "Why should you not mourn?" he asked them, and they shivered in the morning breeze. "Mourn for her for ever."

The old woman went in to light the candles, that the soul of Suen Moi might find its way through the darkness of eternity, and when the funeral procession passed down the path the violets were white.

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THE WILD RIDE OF ZULEIKA.

Translated from the French of Emile Moreau.

WHO can the horseman be that crosses the market-place of Mirouan, sitting erect in his saddle, with lance at rest? As soon as he came in sight the date merchants pointed him out to one another and spoke together in low tones.

It is the invincible El-Malek, chieftain of a fierce mountain train, who venerate him as a saint.

Since he lost his sons, two years ago, El-Malek speaks but little and never smiles. His beard has become almost white, but his arm has lost nothing of its power; he handles his deadly lance as if it were a reed, and when he urges his faithful horse Yussuf across the desert terror follows as his shadow. Yussuf, like all the horses of the South, has a strong back, slender legs, and large hoofs; like the five favourite mares of the prophet, he is descended from Soloman's famous stables; his coat is snowy white, and his long, flowing tail is soft as silk. Yussuf understands and obeys his master's lightest wish.

Erect in his saddle, El-Malek follows with a keen glance among the motley crowd a man in a gold embroidered burnoose, who had just come to Mirouan. The tradesmen also point at this man with their finger, but with a scornful air, as though indicating one stricken with the plague.

This man is Hassan Bey, the insolent chief of the Ouled-Nayls, who, jealous of his brother Ahmed, killed him with arrows shot from afar; he boasts of this deed, and laughs when he sees the crowd move away from him.

He had built upon the D'jelefa plateau, in the centre of his tented village, a stone house, which was also a fortress. For many years he had passed his nights watching the Arab girls dance to the sounds of the *derboukas*; but, one evening, passing near a fountain, he had stopped to look at the young girls filling their copper urns. And now he has come to Mirouan to buy bridal ornaments, for Hassan Bey, chief of the Ouled-Nayls, is to marry the beautiful Zuleika.

Zuleika is only a weaver's daughter, but she is very beautiful. The poor child wept, but she wept in vain, for the weaver is a miser, and the chief of the Ouled-Nayls is not the man to allow himself to be thwarted in his wishes. She must marry Hassan Bey, the fratricide.

Who could prevent it, since Allah permits it?

El-Malek had heard this story only an hour before he reached Mirouan, and he had said to himself: "Allah will not permit it, for I will prevent it."

Zuleika had placed her urn upon the ledge of the fountain, but had not thought of filling it. Her companions one after the other had gone away, but she still remained. It was the last time that she would come to the fountain, for to-morrow Hassan Bey would carry her away to his battlemented house, which was sombre as a tomb.

She lifted up her little bronzed hands to heaven imploring that death might be sent to her. Instead, Hassan Bey appeared, riding upon his flame-coloured horse and escorted by his warriors. He knew that she was at the fountain, and wished to see her there where he had met her for the first time. She was compelled to hear his lying words and to submit to his evil look. The young girl turned her eyes away, and as she began to fill her urn her tears mingled with the water.

"Zuleika!"

Who calls? Certainly Hassan Bey cannot have disguised his voice with such a grave and manly tone. Who is this man, with the white beard, sitting erect in his saddle, lance in hand, looking at her so compassionately?

"Zuleika!" he called once more, pointing to Hassan Bey who was approaching.

She looked up, and suddenly her eyes flashed with a new light, for she felt that this man had been sent by Allah.

"Save me!" she cried; "save me!"

El-Malek held out his hand and aided the young girl to mount before him. Gently holding her frail form he murmured: "Do not be afraid." Then, as though calling upon a brother, El-Malek said: "Yussuf!" The noble animal neighed, and started off like the wind. After Yussuf rushed Hassan Bey, with furious clamour, followed by his warriors. Some of them made as if to draw their bows. "No!" cried Hassan Bey, "do not shoot. I want them both alive!"

Urged on by gentle caresses, Yussuf flew faster and yet more fast. With loud yells Hassan Bey spurred his horse on, riding ahead of his escort. "They shall not escape me," he cries, trembling with rage and anxiety.

"Courage, Yussuf," murmurs El-Malek; "you are called the wind of the desert. Show that you deserve your name, my beauty."

The day advances, the sky seems to be on fire, but Yussuf does not falter. Suffocated at first by the furious flight, Zuleika now began to breathe more freely; so much ground already gained in the direction of El-Malek's mountain tribe meant possible deliverance. The child added her gentle exhortations to El-Malek's encouragements. Hassan Bey's cries seemed to grow more faint. Had he given up the chase?

But whence come these clamours that seem to start from the heights above them. Have his followers climbed and found a shorter way?

It is not the chief's escort that utters these cries. They come from a cabin high up in the mountain; the occupants are watching the exciting chase. Will El-Malek find allies among these people, or will he meet new enemies? His tribes are far away; if he is recognised the fugitives are saved. Arms are raised; they are called!

No, the bows send forth their arrows!

Yussuf utters a painful neigh, and El-Malek responds with a cry of anguish. An arrow has struck the horse's flank, and another has pierced the rider's shoulder.

"Faster, Yussuf! Faster!" beseeches El-Malek.

With a desperate effort Yussuf straightens himself out and flies under the whizzing arrows. He bounds like a gazelle that feels that the lion is on its track.

"Well done, Yussuf!"

Now there are no more arrows to fear; a wall of rocks crowned this height. But death is only staved off—

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blood is streaming from the side of the noble beast; he begins to slacken his pace. El-Malek plies his spurs in vain, and Zuleika wastes her caresses and praise, for the poor animal's hoofs slip in the narrow path, and he staggers. El-Malek's arms tremble, he is beset with fever; the cool of the falling night does not suffice to refresh his brow; the profile of the violet mountain, and the confused shape of the turpentine trees, with their blood-red clusters suspended over the abyss, are mingled before his eyes. He cannot stop to drink at the brook which flows in the ravine, though a mouthful of water would perhaps save him.

Hassan Bey has seen traces of blood upon the rocks, and his cries of hate have become cries of joy.

"We have them!" he cries; "they are ours!"

And yet his voice trembles; he fears the final struggle and El-Malek's terrible lance.

Night has again passed, and the light of morning chases away the jackals that have come, scenting their prey from afar. Yussuf still runs, but much more slowly. Two days' journey separates him from the tribe of which his master is chief. Two days, and Yussuf has but a few hours to live! He feels that with his last breath his beloved master, too, will die. The path becomes narrower. Yussuf reaches the ridge, and, reeling, stops.

"The end has come!" murmured Zuleika, terrified; and for the hundredth time she besought El-Malek: "Do not remain with me. Your horse can still save you alone. Fly!"

"Yussuf can save neither you nor me."

"Then kill me."

"I have promised to save you!"

"Allah has not wished it to be so. Save me from this man!"

"That is what I am going to do. Alight."

"Ah, yes, I understand you. Death is at the bottom of this abyss. I shall seek it."

"You do not understand me. Look!" And with his hand El-Malek pointed to the north, to the other slope of the mountains, which could be seen through the hollow of the rocks.

"You see," he said, "that mirror that shines down there? It is Lake Zabrez. The mountain on the other side of the lake is the Djebel-Sahari. There is the tribe of my fathers; there are encamped my people. Hasten with all your strength. Order the first herdsman you meet to call in my name to his nearest neighbour, so that from summit to summit my name may wake my warriors. Cry to all the echoes of the mountains: 'El-Malek shall not die unavenged!' Go!"

"But it will take two days at the least."

"I will wait. It is my desire."

"Allah be with you!" She kissed the hand of the chief who had saved her life; then she ran down the road as quickly as her failing strength would let her.

El-Malek planted his lance in the ground and supported himself against it, erect in his saddle. He talked for a long time to Yussuf, and the animal shook his bleeding head.

"Halt!" ordered Hassan Bey. Reaching a turn in the road, he had seen El-Malek planted across the defile, and this new attitude astonished and disturbed him.

"Does he pretend to oppose us now? Let us wait, and in the meantime breathe a little."

The advice was good, and no one gainsaid it. Men and horses sought a spring. Hassan Bey, however, did not take his eyes off the redoubtable man who sat there motionless upon his horse between the two walls of rock.

"And now that all have rested enough, forward!"

No one stirred. So long as it was a question of pursuing El-Malek, the chief's followers felt brave enough. Now that they were called upon to attack him face to face, the boldest were afraid. Hassan Bey himself trembled.

"Let him begin," said one; "let him come on."

"Very well," growled the chief.

The day declined; the redoubtable sentinel, who had gleamed white in the burning sun, now stood out in black silhouette against the starry sky. Neither horse nor master stirred, and the lance still stood planted in the ground.

The moon rose, and it was an awesome sight to see this motionless warrior; he watched the enemy with his steady eyes still open, gleaming like diamonds.

"He is covering Zuleika's retreat," Hassan Bey had said to himself at the very first. And yet he remained in his place, changed into a statue, powerless to conquer the fear that emanated from this grand guardian.

After the rosy dawn, the leaden sky; after the red twilight, the blue night; then the aurora again; and the sentinel ever motionless, as well as those whose way he bars. Sometimes the shadow of an eagle makes a fleeting spot on the rocks; then the shadows increase, and great birds come from all corners of the heavens, drawing closer their rapid circles; now it is no longer eagles, but vultures.

They almost touch the lance of the cavalier, but he did not appear to see them. One of them perched upon his shoulder. El-Malek did not stir.

"He is dead!" cried Hassan Bey, mad with anger and spite; and, turning towards his men, who still hesitated, he gave the order: "Forward!"

Neither Hassan Bey nor his men advanced twenty paces. The noise that put the vultures to flight was the galloping of the Bedouin horses that had come from the Djebel-Sahari. The threats that Hassan Bey uttered to keep up his courage were never finished; an arrow pierced his throat, and, falling from his horse, he rolled into the abyss.

"Each one for himself!" cried Ouled-Nayls.

And while they rushed down the path at full speed, without daring to look back, Zuleika, sobbing, kissed the icy hand of the chieftain who had protected her in death as in life.

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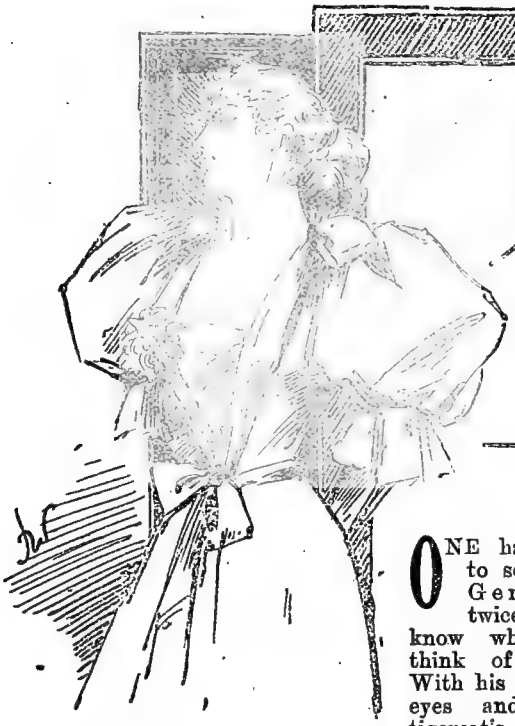

Totor's Drum.

ONE has not to see the General twice to know what to think of him. With his hawk's eyes and his tigercat's moustache, he is the accomplished, classical type of the handsome soldier, full of spirit, with a taste for war, and whose bravery is not without a touch of ferocity. At the same time one imagines that he comes from an old military race, and that it must have taken long generations of cavaliers to arrive at this product of a perfect performance.

When I learnt that the General was writing his memoirs, I immediately conjured up a collection of military orders, a succession of brilliant and monotonous charges, the whole ornamented with proudly drawn-up genealogies.

Well, see how mistaken one may be. Here follows the first chapter of these memoirs.

Upon what a slender thread hangs a destiny! To think that I was born to manufacture and sell silk.

Yes, indeed. My father, my grandfather, and all my ancestors for a long way back, I think, were engaged in the silk industry at Lyons, and evidently it was intended that I should succeed them.

That I have become a general is due to Mamma's black butterflies (low spirits), and, above all, to Totor's drum.

Totor was the son of our gardener at Montgain-sur-Saône, and Mamma's black butterflies were the result of our stay in that district, where she found little to amuse her.

A widow at twenty-six years, left at the head of a great commercial and manufacturing establishment which she did not understand in the least, she had retired temporarily to Montgain to escape the torments of her family, who wanted to marry her again.

This new union, it seems, was necessary to their interests. A man of great experience was needed. Now, this man was ready to the hand. His name was M. Lemattheu.

Thirty-five years old, with a fortune equal to our own, and a name celebrated in the silk industry—in short, exactly the husband required. That is to say, by the family, but not by Mamma. Married a first time in accordance with the requirements of social customs, she rebelled at the idea of being disposed of a second time as an appendage to the dowry. The silk factory might benefit thereby, but her heart would suffer. And hence her black butterflies.

I did not know all this till long afterwards. For the moment, a little fellow of eight years and a half, I saw but one thing—that the house was frightfully sad. Consequently, I stayed in it but little, and my time was spent in playing with Totor.

Playing does not express it; the true word would be tramping; for from the garden we quickly found our way to the village, and from the village to the fields, with all the young scamps of the neighbourhood. The gardener's wife was supposed to watch us, and so was the gardener. But the garden was so large, father and mother Barraud so lenient, the walls so easy to climb, and the alleys so tempting! And, above all, Totor was so shy!

Ah, our fine adventures! I remember them as if it were but yesterday; and there is especially one I shall never forget. Was it not, in fact, my first campaign? My real military service dates from that occasion.

I can still see us that day, organised into a company of soldiers by the ingenious Totor.

He was eleven years old, and had a right to command us—me and the other young rogues of the vicinity. But he respected me, and so I was appointed captain.

Our army was composed of a dozen soldiers, among whom Totor had distributed guns of his own manufacture, to the detriment of vines deprived of props, and of brooms divorced from their handles.

For me he had fashioned a sword, not of vulgar wood like the guns of the men, but of real metal, using the long handle of a frying-pan. In my cap he had stuck the feathers from the tail of an unfortunate rooster, who was obliged thenceforth to hide his shame behind a shed.

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To himself Totor presented a drum. This he had not accomplished without some difficulty. It had been his first intention to utilise a saucepan, but Virginie, the cook, had vetoed that project. In despair Totor had contented himself with an old high hat, *borrowed* from his father, and from which he had torn the brim. It made a black drum, with hollow and muffled sounds. We had the air of leading a funeral procession.

No matter! Thus equipped, we started out for the conquest of pears and grapes, and I marched proudly behind Totor, straightening myself up, with my sword shining in the sunlight, at least, as brilliantly as the handle of a greasy frying-pan can shine. We crossed the village, having no flag except the shirt-flap that floated behind our smallest soldier. And soon we were in the country, ready for pillage, excited by the furious rhythm of the black drum.

"Halt! Who goes there? Advance and give the countersign!"

It was an unknown, formidable voice that welcomed us thus at a turn in a ditch.

An armed enemy was before us.

Composed of a single man, it is true, but what a man! A *real* soldier! What do I say? An officer, with red pantaloons, with a steel scabbard dangling from his left side, and a big curling moustache.

Save himself who can! Our army disbanded, throwing away its guns, and disappeared like a scattered flock of sparrows. I, the captain, let fall at the feet of the conqueror my humiliated pan-handle.

Totor alone put on a bold front, clapped his drum on his head to give himself an imposing air, and answered as bravely as anything:

"France, colonel."

The colonel was only a lieutenant, and began to laugh.

"And where are you going in this fashion," said he, "my little foot-soldiers?"

"Why, to make war, captain," answered Totor, lowering the grade of his enemy, who was no longer terrible now that he laughed.

"Well," continued the officer, "will you serve under my order? I am just now in search of a breakfast to be taken by assault. Conduct me to the nearest restaurant, and I will treat you to a drink, my grenadiers."

Totor's nose at that moment expressed two struggling sentiments. He was attracted by the hope of the drink, but he was disappointed in his heroic projects of making war.

The enemy was far too good-natured, in truth. So Totor preserved a contemptuous silence.

"You will not?" said the officer. "Brave soldiers, you are! But you, the little general, who have such pretty manners?"

And he tapped my cheek coaxingly. Indeed, he was very amiable, this officer, and the more I looked at him the more he pleased me. Tall, slender, young, he had a fine, open face, and his warlike moustache made his soft eyes seem softer by contrast. His very fine hand had caressed my skin.

And suddenly, while Totor was hesitating between his two opposite ideas, there came an idea to me which I thought admirable.

"Yes," said I, "I know of a restaurant, and I am very willing to take you to it."

"Where?" asked Totor.

"Why, our house."

Totor grasped my idea immediately, and cried out gleefully:

"Yes, yes. Oh, that will be a lark."

The officer paid no attention to my dress, though it did not indicate the son of an innkeeper. He took me for such, and followed us.

"And," said he, on the way, "I suppose they feed well at your house, do they not?"

"Pretty well, my nephew," answered Totor, who had grown quite disrespectful towards an enemy whom we seemed to have taken prisoner.

And soon we were at the villa, in the garden, where Mamma, with nothing on her head, and dressed in a morning wrapper, was dolefully taking the air with her black butterflies.

At the sight of Mamma and the coquettish house, the lieutenant perceived the mistake that he had made. He excused himself as best he could. He was out on a surveying excursion, three leagues from the camp at Sathonay, too far to return, and then these young rascals—— He was charming in his excuses, confused but not awkward, at once gallant and exquisitely polite.

As for Mamma, I saw clearly that she was like myself, and that the officer pleased her.

"It is this pretty little rogue," said he, tapping my cheek again, "who is the cause of my indecorum. Pardon me, madame."

"But there is no indecorum," answered Mamma. "I am not at all angry, monsieur, either with you or with him."

She even added (for she was always unable to conceal her thoughts):

"On the contrary."

In short, the lieutenant stayed to breakfast as easily as a thread slips into the needle. He even spent the afternoon at the house. Mamma appeared delighted with him, and so was I.

One is forced to believe, moreover, that our villa was a strategic point of the highest importance, for thenceforth it became the centre of the famous surveying operations.

And certainly the topography of its surroundings, and especially of our garden, must be minutely noted on the military maps, for the lieutenant soon formed the habit of studying it every day.

One is forced to believe, also, that his red pantaloons frightened the black butterflies, for they flew away as soon as he appeared, from the very first day.

Mamma became joyous again, and her joy continually increased for three months, until the moment when it blossomed out completely, on the day when Mamma abandoned my father's name, but not to take that of M. Lemattheiu.

The affairs of the commercial establishment were wound up. My ancestors blushed, no doubt, at our treason. But I had not the slightest remorse, and I have none to this hour. I formed a taste for the noble profession of my stepfather; instead of learning debit and credit, I learnt fencing, horsemanship, and the various other things required for entrance to Saint Cyr. And now, thanks to Mamma's black butterflies and to Totor's drum, I am a general.

Yet of my ancestors there remains with me one indelible mark. There is still one kind of silk with which I am somewhat familiar—that of which flags are made.

Jean Richepin.

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THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

SUMMARY.

Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, is tracked to the World's Fair Grounds at Chicago. He is last seen, after an exciting chase by Mr. Inspector Grey and his assistant, Detective Dean, locked in a burning boat on the lake. Detective Dean finds a cipher in the convict's bed, which he sells to Mr. Richard Sheldon for £3,000.

CHAPTER V.

The Cryptogram.

The piece of parchment which the detective had given to Richard Sheldon was time-worn, creased, well-nigh illegible.

More than that, the few lines it bore were formed, not of letters, but of characters peculiarly shaped, vague, and entirely unintelligible to the man who had just paid £2,000 for its possession.

And yet, as he surveyed it, the sinister eyes of Sheldon sparkled as though he was regarding a pearl of unheard of value, the clue to untold riches, the key to a vast fortune.

"It is, it must be, the missing link," he murmured, after nearly an hour's silent, engrossed inspection of the musty document. "He carried it, he treasured it. Dead! the detective silenced, 407 out of my path for ever—what is the next step?"

He answered the query by drawing before him a blank telegraph form.

Across its surface he hastily traced the following lines:

"*Col. Lytle.—Come. Coast clear at last.*"

Signing only his initials, and appending the city address of the friend to whom the message was directed, Richard Sheldon rang for a servant, ordered the immediate transmission of the message, and proceeded to enjoy his rather late breakfast.

At two o'clock that same afternoon a lithe, wiry man of about forty rang at the front door of Mr. Sheldon's residence.

He bore a contrast to Sheldon only as one beast of prey differs from another of a different species. The never-resting eyes bespoke more will and daring, but no more cunning and craftiness than those of the master spirit who had summoned him, and who sat awaiting him in his favourite chamber of council and lounge, the library.

Proceeded to enjoy his rather late breakfast.

Colonel Lytle held in his hand, crumpled up, the telegram that had summoned him. He nodded at his host with easy familiarity, his small bead-like eyes studying his face keenly. Mechanically waving the bit of paper, he remarked inquiringly:

"You sent for me—you have learned something?"

"As the telegram tells you, the coast is clear," replied Sheldon.

"You mean——"

"Convict No. 407 is dead."

"Dead!" echoed the other, starting up from his seat.

"Yes. He was cornered by the man I employed."

"Detective Dean?"

"The same. Cornered; he hid in a boat. It took fire—sunk. That is the last of Adrian Burgoyne."

Lytle looked grave. The intelligence not only shocked but seemed to depress him.

"That makes a bad complication," he remarked, after a thoughtful pause.

"How?"

"For five years your one hope has been that this man would reveal the secret you wished to learn. Failing to do that——"

"Wait!" interrupted Sheldon, going to the doors and windows in turn, and closing them securely. "It is well, at this vital stage of the case, for you and I to consider seriously its manifold issues. There need be no quibbles of expression between two men who have been so necessary each to the other as you and I for the past six years."

"Scarcely," smiled Lytle, "seeing that such a friendship has made of you a millionaire, and, as well, regally supplied my own expensive wants."

"Very good, then. About five years since I was a struggling lawyer, you a penniless police-court bailiff. Hardship had almost made me forget that I ever had decent connections. The fact was revived one day, however, in a most remarkable manner."

"You mean by the appearance of Adrian Burgoyne?"

"Don't interrupt me! Of course I mean him," spoke Sheldon somewhat testily. "Years before, a warm friend of my father, Ralph Ringold, had gone

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to Mexico. There, under high official patronage, he acquired prestige and wealth. His wife died and he sent his daughter and only child to the care of the matron of a young ladies' school near this city. An insurrection arose in the province where he resided. He was compelled to fly for his life. Gathering together what available funds and valuables he could readily reach, he fled at night. Pursued, he was attacked, shot from his horse, but managed to creep to the hacienda of a friend. That friend was an Englishman who had settled there, and who was named Adrian Burgoyne."

"Convict 407."

"Exactly. Dying, Ralph Ringold bade this young man hasten north, to escape the coming of the insurgents, to convey to his old-time friend and confident, Richard Sheldon, a message."

"Yourself?"

"Yes. Burgoyne came. He placed in my hands a packet, of the contents of which he professed to be ignorant. He said he would call the next day and bring a sealed letter, which his friend Ringold had told him contained a weighty, an important secret."

"After he was gone," interpolated the Colonel, stroking his moustache with a sinister smile, "we opened the packet."

"We did."

"And found?"

"Six thousand pounds in bank notes—all the available funds Ralph Ringold had been able to lay his hands on in the haste of flight."

"Dead!" echoed the other, starting up from his seat.

"Which was quite a startler for us," remarked Lytle.

"A startler?" echoed Sheldon, with animation. "Rather a providence, a windfall, a tempter, the nucleus of mighty wealth. Think what six thousand pounds meant to two impecunious adventurers like you and me, grubbing for our next meal—often forced within bare touch of the threshold of a prison!"

"That money we counted."

"And appropriated," interrupted Sheldon bluntly. "We found a letter accompanying it. The name of my friend, Ralph Ringold, was signed to it. Dying, he implored me in that hasty scrawl, to care, first, last, and always for his orphaned daughter—Patrice. She was at school—he wrote me where. He made me guardian of her fortune—he placed entire trust in me. She had no friends, no relatives. He had none, and Burgoyne was simply a chance acquaintance, who knew little of his affairs, and who, after delivering the package, he stated, would depart on his way."

"Ah, there was where we blundered," sighed the Colonel dolorously.

"How?"

"By arousing his suspicions."

"True. We at once decided to benefit personally by the trust reposed in our hands. We decided to visit the daughter of the dead man, inform her of his death, and tell her she was a pauper, as well as an orphan. That was your task. To end two diverging lines of our plans, we will say that Patrice was removed to the charge of a lonely widow, by you, who has since been paid so much a year to care for her. As to the money, that I invested in trade. Who says opportunity does not make the man? In two years I doubled it; in four I was independently rich."

"And in five," remarked Lytle, with a covert sneer, "puff! you tackled the Stock Exchange. What would people say, the staid conservative mercantile community, if they knew that the honest and enterprising Robert Sheldon was flying financial kites made of the rottenest of all rotten negotiable paper, and on the verge of bankruptcy?"

"Silence!" cried the other, his hands beating a nervous tattoo on the desk at his side. "That is an up-and-down of business all men encounter, and one we must ride over. It is the resolve to fight my way out of my difficulties that bids me believe an easy method lies before us. But, to return to the main branch of our narrative, the next day Adrian Burgoyne returned."

"To overhear you and I discussing our cool projects for fleecing the orphan and feathering our own nest," spoke Lytle coarsely.

Sheldon winced at the blunt allusion.

"About that," he confessed. "He heard enough to unmask us in our true colours. He burst in upon us like a young hurricane. He accused us of meditated villainy; he demanded back the packet. He threatened to appeal to the law. He insisted on knowing the whereabouts of Patrice Ringold. He gave us ten days in which to surrender our trust, and left my office—"

"A marked man. We had money and influence. We set an unscrupulous hireling in our pay on his tracks. He was duped, decoyed. By a lucky accident for us, he was drawn into a meeting of anarchists. During a hot discussion a man was killed. We saw our chance. We suborned witnesses, and circumstances aided us. Adrian Burgoyne was convicted of the crime, was branded as a dangerous revolutionist from Mexico, and became convict No. 407 with a life sentence."

"And then," resumed Sheldon, taking up the thread of the narrative, "we felt safe. We had silenced him. We had entangled him in a net, through the strong meshes of which it was impossible for him to break. We surrounded him, through bribery, with extra precautions, so he could not communicate with the authorities. We broke his spirit. We destroyed his usefulness as an active foe, until—"

"We learnt the truth."

"Yes, by discovering pencilled on a paper in the packet we had overlooked a last communication from dying Ralph Ringold. This is it. I have preserved it."

From a secret drawer in the desk the merchant drew forth a yellow, time-worn sheet of paper. He handed it to his companion, who for the fiftieth time perused it.

"You have my instructions, my dear Sheldon," it ran, "but there is something else. See first to Patrice, for her welfare is my dying thought; but when you have seen her in safe hands, and given her the ready money saved from

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the wreck of my possessions here, I have another mission for you to execute. The six thousand pounds is a paltry nothing compared to the immense fortune I possess besides. I have given to young Burgoyne, secured in a little rubber pouch, a chronicle of the hiding place of this larger fortune, which I dare not trust to write out here. He will hand it to you.

For the fiftieth time he perused it.

Follow its directions. As soon as the insurrection is over come at once to Mexico and secure this treasure, which in my flight I dared not bring, which I could not reach in time. The secret document in the rubber pouch will tell you all. It is the key to wealth that will make my darling Patrice heiress to a fortune beside which that of a Rothschild—"

Age and wear had blurred the remainder of the pencilled scrawl. Perhaps approaching dissolution had unnerved the fingers of the dying man as he wrote it.

"That letter aroused us to fresh exertions," proceeded Sheldon.

"We were satisfied that Burgoyne had the rubber pouch packet containing the clue to the hiding place of an immense fortune; that he had hidden it; was withholding it to baffle us. We interviewed him in prison. Defiantly he boasted of a knowledge of the clue. Since then, by every means, we have searched for the clue, we have coaxed and menaced Burgoyne alternatively. We employed that keen-witted detective, Dean, to endeavour to gain his confidence and secure it."

"And all in vain?"

"Yes, until to-day."

"Ha!"

Colonel Lytle sprang from his seat as if shot.

"I understand," he murmured, in an intense tone, between his pursed lips. "That is why you have sent for me."

"Exactly," replied Sheldon, a triumphant smile on his thin lips.

"You telegraphed: 'The coast is clear.'"

"Meaning that our only foe, Burgoyne, is dead, yes."

"And you have—"

"The clue."

"Sure?"

"Beyond the peradventure of a doubt."

"Where—how—when did you get it?" panted the excited Lytle.

"From the detective, Dean—only to-day—I bought it—price £2,000."

"Phew! it comes high."

"But is invaluable. Yes, Lytle," went on the other, in a quiver with excitement and delight commingled, "the key to Ralph Ringold's hidden fortune is in my possession at last!"

"Show it to me."

Hard, cracked and dry was the eager voice; elfish, sinister and gloating the evil face of the merchant's ally and accomplice.

From his pocket Richard Sheldon drew the self-same bit of parchment that the detective had sold to him for a small fortune earlier in the day.

He spread it out carefully, daintily. He gloated over it.

A jumble of strange signs, of incongruous curves, dashes and lines, a scrawl in peculiar hieroglyphics—at it Colonel Lytle fairly glared.

"Why!" he exploded, "it's indecipherable!"

"Is it?" smiled the sanguine Sheldon. "It was written for a purpose, was it not?"

"Certainly."

"It is the key, the one existing clue, to the Ringold fortune."

"I will admit that."

"Then do not say that it is indecipherable. There lies my only hope of retrieving my fallen fortunes—of reigning a social and financial monarch."

"But its import—the key?" queried the incredulous Lytle.

"The key?" repeated Sheldon. "Ah, look on the back!"

He turned the bit of parchment over as he spoke.

A single line in pencil, barely intelligible, looked up at the eager inspecting eyes of Colonel Lytle.

And it read:

"My daughter Patrice has the key to this cryptogram."

CHAPTER VI.

The Victim of a Crime.

The mists hung heavily over land and lake. Like winding sheets or a drifting pall, the tangible wreaths of vapour took to themselves fantastic shapes.

Pressing its muzzle close to the woodwork of the hatchframe, he fired.

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South from the vast park area, where the domes of the magnificent World's Fair buildings loomed up like airy fabrics of fairyland, the beach rounded sharply to the south. Here grew a dense line of evergreens, stunted and sparse in stature and foliage.

One clump, almost at the very water's edge, resembled a mound, its sharp, jagged edges of outline being the sport and play of spray and mist alike.

Suddenly from this bank of blank there was a movement. A form moved, crept out upon the sandy beach, struggled to an erect position, and glared about in perplexity and terror.

He had crawled up on the beach.

The figure was that of a man, but so forlorn in face and raiment that one might imagine he had been the victim of some battle, a lone refugee from some deadly combat.

It was true. He had indeed been the victim of a conflict so terrible that, as the rising sun dispelled the mists slowly, the refreshing air seemed to clear his dazed brain as well, and with a shudder he gazed seaward, haunted with the memory of a battle, indeed—a long-handed, desperate warfare with the giant forces of Nature.

"Alive—saved—here!" he ejaculated, each word being spoken painfully and slow. "It is destiny—fate—providence!"

Yes, fire and blood has passed him by—he recalled the experience with a shiver; the hands of justice had unclenched their cruel, mailed fingers. Outcast from the very elements, alien on a home shore, wrecked in port, his thoughts overpowered him, and he sank to the sandy beach, mute, marvelling, exhausted.

As he shrank there, in the pitiful attire, the hollow face, the weird, haunted eyes, there was that which told of a mind benumbed coming back to life with a shock.

So long did he stare at the lake, so often did his thin, trembling hand go up to his clouded brow in a dreamy, uncertain way, that it seemed as if the old lethargy was once again taking possession of his senses.

Abruptly, however, a shrill whistle, as of some steamer off on the water, aroused him with a shock, announcing the proximity of human beings. As if his hand was against every man's and every man's hand against him, he sprang to his feet, limped back to cover, with one inexplicable gesture towards the dashing waves that beat their spray full over him, and the far more inexplicable cry:

"Dead!—they think me dead—drowned! Convict 407 lies *there!*"

With almost an hysterical laugh he pointed to the lake. Then he crept in among the dense evergreens, over gnarled roots, and under low drooping branches, nor rested until he was ensconced in the very heart of that jungle-like thicket.

No. 407? Yes, the refugee of the prison, the fugitive from Dormitory D., Robert Lane, the victim of one of the foulest crimes of the nineteenth century, had escaped!

Lying there, with half closed eyes, physical pains, mental suffering were subdued to indifferent languor, as, vividly, rapidly, before his vision seemed to pass impressive portraitures of the occurrences of the past six hours.

Like a being fighting hard for life and liberty against banded superior numbers, the real peril, the real struggle had begun when Adrian Burgoyne found himself, by his own desperate act, adrift on turbulent waters, shut in securely to the dismal hold of the barge, with a fierce ravenous fire raging the width of a plank overhead.

There was one aperture only beside the battened-down hatch—the little window at the stern, through which he had reached to cut the cable securing the craft ashore.

Little, indeed, he found it as he sought vainly to crowd through it. The four by six aperture would not admit the passage of a child.

In a frenzy of dread and desperation he had climbed the notched post. With all the strength of which he was capable he pressed his shoulders against the hatch cover. He failed to move it more than an inch, and then the clank of the iron bar rattling in its loose fastenings told how futile were his weak efforts against that formidable barrier.

Through the chinks about the cover, too, he could see the encroaching flames, the dense smoke. The fierce crackling of the tinder-like *débris* on deck sounded like the knell of doom.

"Oh, it is horrible," he panted, "to be shut in here, helpless, to smother, scorch! I *must* escape! I *will not* die!"

He endeavoured to fix the position of the hasp-fastening of the iron bar that held the hatch cover down. His one weapon was a revolver. It must be employed as a tool now. Pressing its muzzle close to the woodwork of the hatch frame, he fired.

Bang—bang—bang—bang—bang—bang—bang! The seven reports rang out in deafening dissonance in that smoke-clouded, confined hold; with every explosion a shock ran up his arm and thrilled his frame. Then eagerly he flared a match, and pressed eyes and hands close to the woodwork.

"Courage, success!" breathed the beleaguered victim of direful peril.

Powder and ball had shattered a portion of the framework. He could look through, he could reach through, the aperture. His trembling fingers rested on the iron bar. With a splinter of wood he began working at the hasp, holding it in place—an extra push, there was a clang like falling manacles, and he was free.

With half a cheer on his excited lips the convict thrust up the hatch cover. A shower of cinders beat about his head and shoulders like hail; a swift searing tongue of flame twisted about him like a shroud.

He wavered as he gained the deck. Fire encircled him. He grasped the heavy hatch cover. Holding it as a shield in the direction where the fire beat the fiercest, he struggled to the side of the craft.

His clothing was on fire in a dozen places, his hands and face were blistered, every vestige of hair on face and head was crisped to cinders ere he reached the water's edge.

He seemed to be inhaling draughts of liquid fire. Without hesitation, holding the hatch-cover in a fainting grasp, he hurled himself sheer into the lake.

Then coolness, Heaven after Hades, a sense of safety, and he drifted, as his float drifted, away from the blazing craft, and out into the gloom and darkness of a storm-beaten sea.

How, when, where he reached land, he did not realise. Somehow he had crawled up the beach, and presently came to the shelter of the dense evergreens that now ensconced him.

He was adjudged dead—drowned; the relentless pursuit of justice had ceased. It was that thought which acted as a sedative to restlessness and dread. It illumined his face with hope, it drove anxiety from his mind, it admitted

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of his taking the perfect rest his forlorn condition demanded.

Impervious to chill, damp, hunger, and thirst, the old Robert Lane, the real Adrian Burgoyne, reflected over the past with a set, resentful face, considered the present with grim resignation and patience, groped into the future with a soul, bitter, resolute, uncompromising.

All day long within him a great mental battle raged. Thoughts, terrible, pathetic, pitiful, by turn, excited, aroused, and depressed him. The shades of dusk haunted the landscape ere he ventured from his hiding-place.

The past was dead; the world was all before him!

His injured foot still pained him, and he limped badly. He was weak from hunger. Wild-eyed, he scanned the lake and its long circular sweep of beach. With a shudder he regarded the straggling outposts of the city that had lured him to a magnet-like embrace, only to crush and destroy his hopes, his happiness, his ambitions.

He turned his back upon it, with a bitter, resentful sigh; he fixed his glance across the sandy beaches beyond which lay the great factories and mills.

From one of these, far round the curve of the beach glowed, like a sinister star of light, the mouth of some great blast furnace.

Like an evil eye, it fascinated and guided him. He started towards it.

Once only he paused. It was at the apex of a great sand ridge. Like some gaunt, weird watchman of the desolate spot, he glanced back at the blur of light against the northern heavens, marking the World's Fair grounds, melting into the city beyond.

The enterprise, the turmoil, the dash, the spirit of man's mighty ambitions were typified there, but in the charmed circle, he, refugee, outcast, convict, had no place. Danger lurked there. In its dark lair, grim, ravenous, ever watchful, the law menaced him. With a despairing wave of his hand, Adrian Burgoyne seemed to bid adieu to it all.

Resolutely he set his face towards the humblertemples of toil, the woods beyond, the green pastures, the still waters.

The past was dead; the world was all before him!

For good or for bad—which?

(To be continued.)

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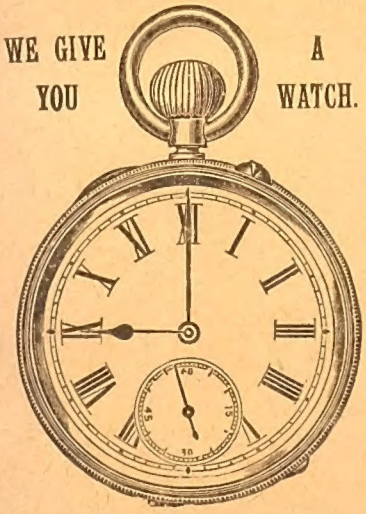

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